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GOING GLOBAL

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- Exclusive interview with CEO James Asquith
- What it was really like to fly on board

JAL FLIGHT 123

How a hidden repair flaw downed a Boeing 747

WIZZ AIR'S XLRATION

Welcoming the A321XLR to the low-cost world

LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

Why IAG's low-cost long-haul bet is still in the game

LEVEL
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ON THE WINGS OF ATHENA

Aegean Airlines' ascent to excellence

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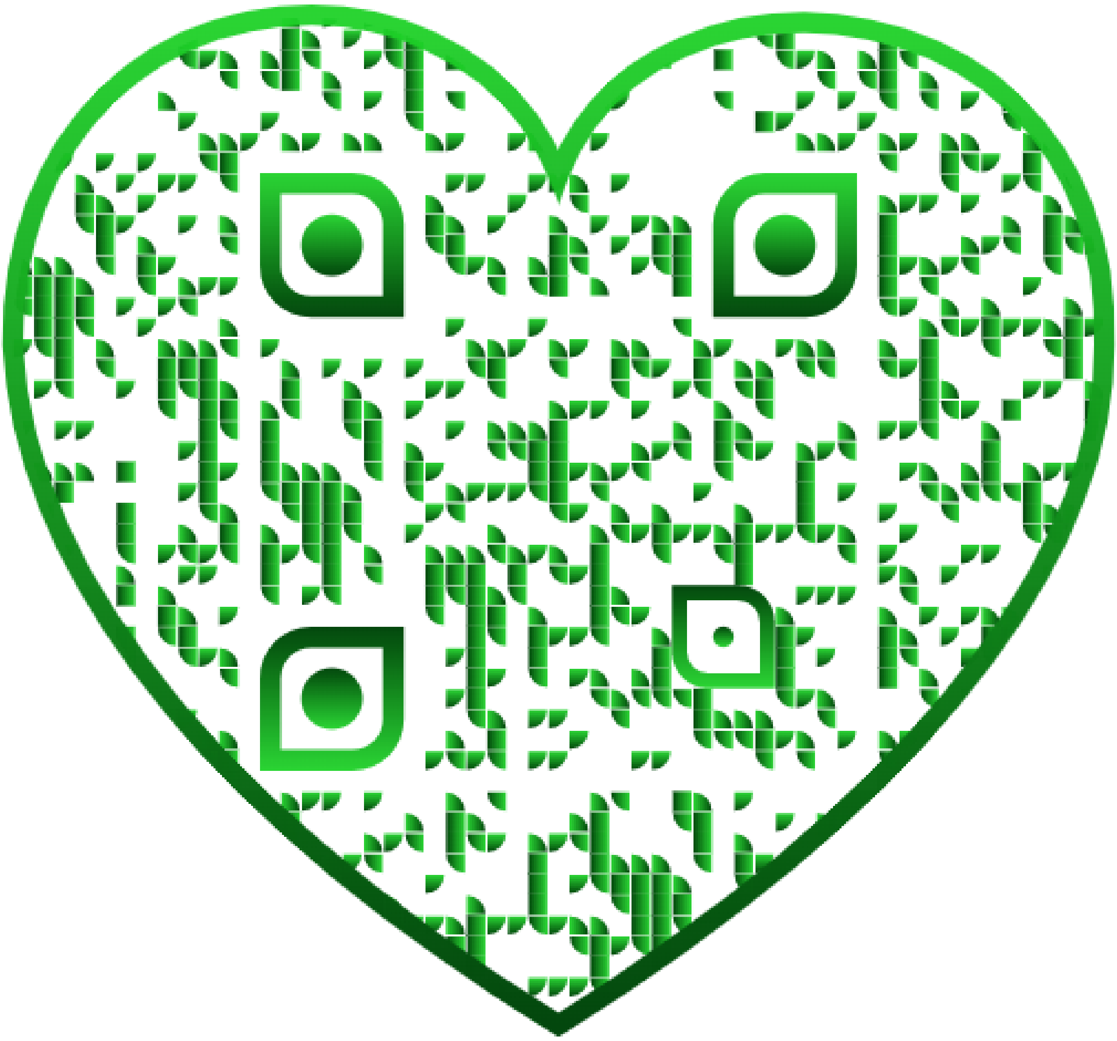

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Welcome

Hello and welcome to the August issue of *Airliner World*, incorporating *Airports of the World*. The global aviation community was shaken on June 12 by the tragic loss of Air India Flight 171. The Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner, VT-ANB (c/n 36279), was operating from Ahmedabad to London/Gatwick when it crashed shortly after take-off, resulting in the loss of 241 out of 242 people on board and at least 38 more on the ground. It marks one of the worst air disasters in recent Indian history. Our thoughts are with all those affected by the crash.

The cause of the accident remains under investigation. However, what is clear is that this incident comes at a pivotal moment for Air India. In the last three years, the airline has been undergoing a multi-billion-dollar high-profile transformation – dubbed Vihaan.AI – under the ownership of Tata Group, which aims to shake off decades of underperformance and emerge as a world-class flag carrier. That journey, though far from complete, had been gaining some serious momentum in recent years. This tragedy is not only a human catastrophe, but also a critical test of the airline's ability to retain hard-earned public trust.

Just days before the accident, I had been in Delhi for the 81st International Air Transport Association (IATA) annual general meeting (see page 28). It was a landmark event for Indian aviation – a celebration of the country's surging air travel market and its growing importance in global airline networks. India was, rightly, the focus of attention.

I flew to the AGM with the country's flag carrier on one of its brand-new Airbus A350-900s from London/Heathrow. My goal was to see for myself how the airline's new product stacked up – following the in-depth report we published in our December 2024 issue. The experience was excellent: fresh, confident and a world away from the Air India many travellers recall.

While in Delhi, I also joined a media roundtable with Air India CEO Campbell Wilson. He spoke with characteristic honesty about the challenges the airline is facing while undergoing its transformation – from delayed aircraft deliveries to supply chain problems hitting its cabin overhauls – but also about the progress being made across the board and the positive impact this is already having on its passenger net promoter score. There was an air of optimism in the room from all involved.

That makes the crash of Flight 171 all the more devastating. It risks derailing much of the goodwill and momentum the airline has worked so hard to build. Regaining public confidence will be one of the toughest aspects of the recovery, especially for an airline that is actively trying to rewrite its legacy.

We will, of course, follow the investigation as it develops.

Separately, I'm pleased to present a packed issue of *Airliner World* this month, which contains the fruits of the editorial team's recent travels: Kicking things off, Robert Veitch took a trip to Hamburg to witness the handover of Wizz Air's first Airbus A321XLR – a game-changing aircraft for the low-cost carrier; then Lee Cross visited Aegean Airlines in Athens to find out how the carrier has plotted its path to success; and I reported from the IATA AGM on the impactful speech made by its director general Willie Walsh. Of course, we can't forget our cover story this month – Global Airlines: I delved into its story and spoke to founder James Asquith about the journey so far. There's so much more too, so wherever you are in the world, I hope you enjoy this issue of *Airliner World*.

Thomas

Thomas Haynes
Editor

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COVER: ***Global Airlines' A380-841, 9H-GLOBL (c/n 120), lands at Barcelona/El Prat on May 2 on a proving flight prior to entry into service*** AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/JAVI SANCHEZ

BELOW: ***The view from my Air India A350 flight to Delhi on May 31, 2025*** KEY-THOMAS HAYNES

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UEFA
CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
A7-BED

ABOVE: ***Qatar Airways brought Boeing 777-3DZER, A7-BED (c/n 60330), to Paris, recently bedecked in a special Champions League livery***
ALL IMAGES VINCENZO PACE UNLESS STATED

Reflections from Paris

Richard Schuurman reports from the 2025 Paris Air Show – an event like no other, but possibly not for the reasons one might expect

The usual competition with Airbus was 'a no-no' at the 55th Paris Air Show after Boeing announced two days before the start that it would not make any announcements out of respect for the victims of the Ahmedabad Air India crash on June 12. Except for a couple of briefings, the US airframer cancelled all commercial announcements. Kelly Ortberg, Group CEO, and Stephanie Pope, Boeing Commercial Airplanes CEO, decided not to attend, but instead concentrated on supporting Air India in the aftermath of the accident.

Brad McMullen, senior vice president of commercial sales and marketing, was in Paris to engage with customers. It's not that Boeing didn't sign any deals, but those deals would not be announced until early July as part of the monthly orders and deliveries update, to count as airshow orders later on. It's likely the same for GE Aerospace and CFM, which also opted to keep a low profile and cancelled all media events in Paris, given that the Air India aircraft operated GE engines.

Airbus, Embraer and ATR orders totalled 561 commercial aircraft, including firm orders, options, purchase rights, memorandums of understanding (MoU) and letters of intent (LOI). There were 217 new orders, 111 options and 177 MoUs/LOIs for orders and options, plus 50 purchase rights and a previously announced order for six aircraft. Of these, Airbus won 142 new orders, 106 options, 152 MoUs and the six previously announced orders, while Embraer went home with 75 new orders, five options and 50 purchase rights. Without Boeing, Airbus dominated the three trade days from June 16-19.

100 A321neos

By size, the biggest order came from Vietjet Air for 100 Airbus A321neos plus purchase rights for another 50. Announced as an MoU during the press conference Vietjet president and CEO Nguyễn Thị Phuong Thảo referred

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CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
RIYADH AIR
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to it as a firm order. The A321neos are in addition to the 138 already in the orderbook, of which Airbus had delivered 36 by the start of June, with six more sourced elsewhere. As recently as late May, the airline had ordered another 20 A330-900s to double its backlog for the type. Together with 200 Boeing 737 MAXs that were reconfirmed at Farnborough 2022, the carrier needs all those aircraft to develop Vietnam into a major hub.

Phuong Thảo said the regional network, and routes to India, China and Indonesia, will be expanded, while the airline is also targeting flights to Europe, including the UK, Germany and France, and to the US. She chided airframers for not delivering on time, her wording seemingly more directed to Boeing as none of the MAX aircraft ordered back in 2016 have been delivered. Boeing is due to begin deliveries, but with the US and Vietnam in a trade war that saw President Trump impose 46% tariffs on the country, only to suspend them until mid-July, the effect on Vietjet's MAX order is unclear.

Thanks a LOT

By far the most sensitive order came from LOT Polish Airlines on day one of the show, when it announced it had opted for the Airbus A220 ahead of the Embraer E2 to renew and grow its fleet. It was a bitter pill to swallow for the Brazilians, who were informed of the decision over the weekend before the show began. The Warsaw-based carrier was the E170 launch customer back in 2004 and has since grown its Embraer fleet to 44 aircraft. Having issued a request for proposal from both original equipment manufacturers (OEM) last year and leased three E195-E2s from Azorra, an informed source told *Airliner World* that LOT took the lease to check out the E2 before making a final choice.

Francisco Gomes Neto, Embraer CEO, visited Poland twice in recent months to offer an extensive industrial work package including assembly of the KC-390 multirole transporter and tanker, sub-assembly of E2 parts and an E1 passenger-to-freighter conversion line. But French-Polish relations and politics weighed heavily on LOT's final decision, as was evident in the Airbus chalet when the order was announced. The Polish infrastructure minister was there, as was the Canadian minister of industry and ambassadors, plus Airbus' CEO Guillaume Faury and commercial aircraft CEO Christian Scherer to witness the signing.

Michał Fijoł, LOT Polish Airlines CEO, said: "It was not an easy process, we got two very competitive offers, but I am pleased that you [Airbus] wanted us more. That's the reason why we are here. We truly believe that the A220 is the right aircraft for the future of LOT." The airline ordered 20 A220-100s and 20 A220-300s and will take delivery of the larger variant first. In total, five E170s, 15 E175s, eight E190s and 16 E195s will be replaced, while the three E2s will "fly as long as possible" until 2030. The carrier has 44 options but won't need those aircraft until after 2032 and the expansion of Warsaw/Chopin.

At an informal event the same evening, Embraer's Gomes Neto said: "It's the customer who decides, but »

BELOW: ***Airbus sold 25 A350-1000s to Riyadh Air with 25 options, while Starlux ordered ten***

A350
1000
AIRBUS A350-1000

LEFT: ***Embraer made sales to Airlink, All Nippon Airways, SkyWest and Bridges Air Cargo*** RICHARD SCHUURMAN

Purchase Agreement
LOT Polish Airlines and AIRBUS
20 A220-100 and 20 A220-300
LOT

BELOW: ***The moment LOT Polish Airlines signed with Airbus for 40 A220s*** RICHARD SCHUURMAN

this has been a politically motivated decision. We still believe our E2 would have been the best aircraft for LOT as it is 13% more fuel efficient than the A220." Arjan Meijer, CEO Commercial Aviation at Embraer, thought the A220 to be too big for LOT, too close to their MAX 8s, and that E2 pilot training would take only a couple of days: "A transition to the E2 would have saved them many millions".

Embraer bounces back

Embraer looked happier on day three after announcing an order for 60 E175s with 50 purchase rights from US carrier SkyWest, which operates the type on behalf of Delta Air Lines. Meijer noted: "Together with the order for 90 from American we received last year, we have got a great backlog for the E175. Airlines and passengers like the aircraft, which will be updated with larger luggage bins and mood lightning and Recaro seats. We expect a sizable market for the coming years."

Elsewhere, All Nippon Airways (ANA) confirmed a previously announced order for 15 E190-E2s with five options. A new E2 customer materialised in the form of South Africa's Airlink, which will lease ten E195-E2s from Azorra, after a leasing deal with Malaysia's SKS Airways fell through last year. Embraer believes the E2 will be most useful on thinner routes where larger narrowbodies are just too big. Meijer also confirmed the first two E190F converted freighters will be placed with Bridges Air Cargo instead of a Kenyan customer. Bridges will lease the aircraft from Regional One, which ordered two more E190Fs during the show.

A350 joy

Airbus also won some significant A350 orders, particularly from Riyadh Air with 25 A350-1000s plus 25 options. In contrast to its usual eagerness for media attention, the carrier opted to eschew a public signing for the third type in its prospective 182 aircraft fleet, of which there is one physical aircraft. An order for six A350-900s from Egyptair was undisclosed from January, so it didn't count as an air show order.

Saudi lessor AviLease placed its first direct order with Airbus for 30 A320neo Family aircraft plus 25 options, as well as ten A350Fs with 12 options. Narrowbodies might be the 'bread and butter' for AviLease, but the A350Fs will likely be placed mostly with Saudi customers to meet future requirements developing the cargo market. With sale and leasebacks and the acquisition of the Standard Chartered portfolio, AviLease is two years ahead of its schedule to join the ten biggest lessors by 2030 with a portfolio worth $20bn.

A pair of A350Fs were ordered by Turkish cargo specialist MNG Airlines, while Taiwan's Starlux ordered ten more A350-1000s for delivery from

BELOW: ***Airbus brought A321XLR, F-WWBZ (c/n 11058), to Paris in a bespoke Riyadh Air livery***

RIYADH AIR
طيران الرياض
F-WWBZ
Gulfstream

2031, with the aim of deployment to new destinations in the US and Europe. Japan's ANA confirmed an order for 14 A321neos, plus ten A321neos and three XLRs for low-cost subsidiary Peach. Benoît de Saint-Exupéry, Airbus' executive vice president of sales of Commercial Aircraft, summarised: "I look back very positively at what we achieved commercially, obviously with the [Air India/Boeing] backdrop. We have done good announcements on almost all products, so we rate this air show as extremely positive for us."

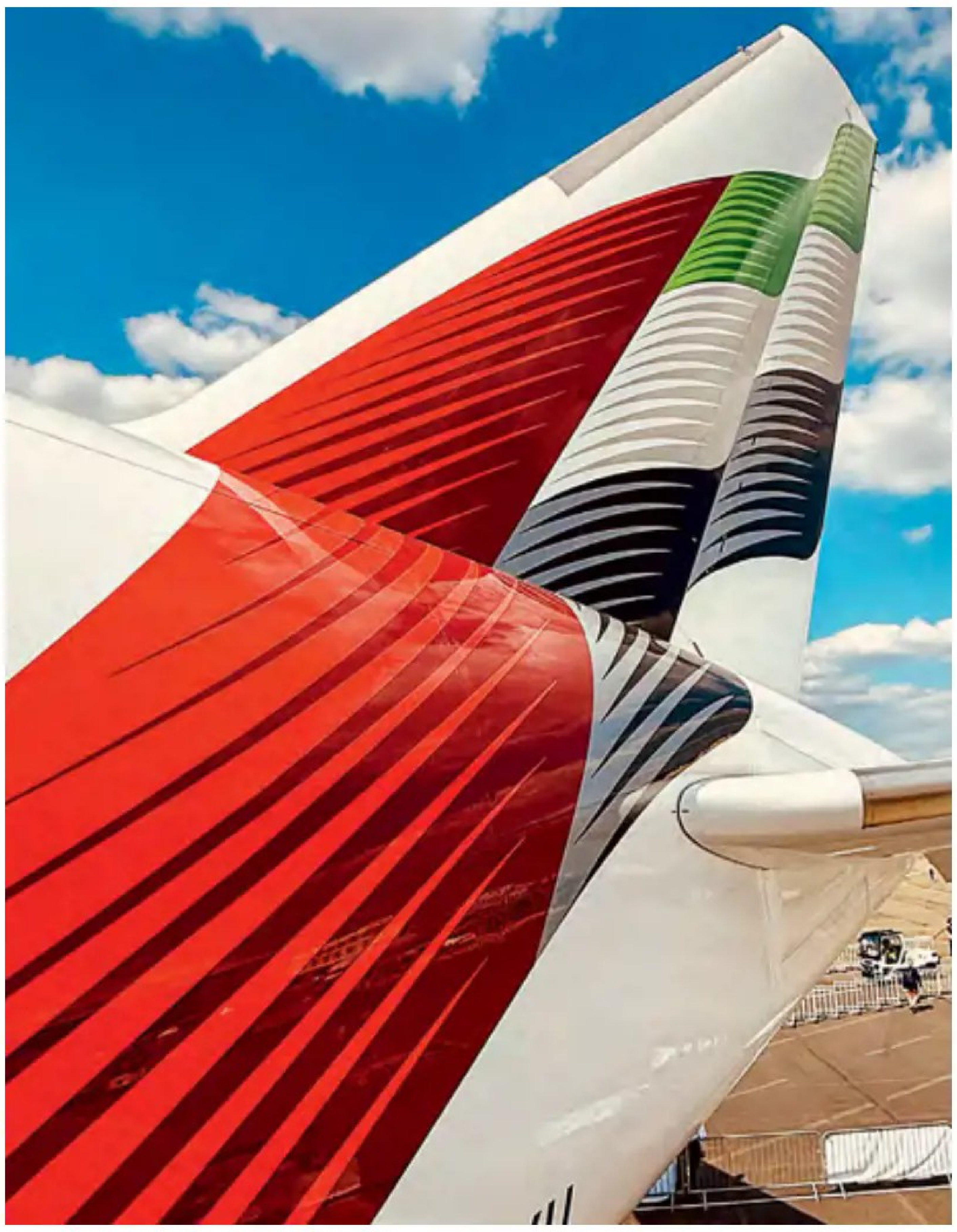
RIGHT: ***Embraer brought its E195 E2, PR-ZIQ (c/n 19020041), to Paris in the Profit Hunter Tech Eagle livery***

Turboprop momentum

Elsewhere, ATR presented a positive outlook for the turboprop market, forecasting demand for some 2,100 aircraft through to 2044. The manufacturer expects significant growth in the Asia-Pacific region for 835 aircraft, and predicted India to be a strong market at 210 aircraft. Europe with 360 and North America with 255 are likely to be replacement demand, while Africa and the Middle East are forecast to require 240 turboprops. In contrast, Embraer reduced its turboprop forecast by 250 aircraft to 1,780.

ATR said it will collaborate closely with Pratt & Whitney Canada to introduce new technology into the existing PW127-XT engine (including hybrid-electric) to make the aircraft more efficient. The outcome of this is essential for the manufacturer to decide when it is ready to launch the EVO model. Nathalie Tarnaud Laude, CEO, said it still targets a 2030 launch and a 2035 entry into service, but stressed that it would make no sense to offer an aircraft that is too expensive and complicated for its loyal customer base in remote countries.

> "We truly believe that the A220 is the right aircraft for the future of LOT"



BELOW: ***Emirates flew its newest A350 to Paris on the day it took delivery of A6-EXH (c/n 695), to showcase its upgraded business, premium economy and economy class cabins***

While De Havilland Canada focused on the launch of the Twin Otter 300G to Ethiopian Airlines, the company is still working to complete its business case for an updated Dash 8. At Farnborough last year the airframer said it would be ready this year, but confirmed more time is needed. Ryan DeBrusk, vice president of sales and marketing, said there is strong demand with potential customers who would like to see the Dash 8 back into production with updated specs and cabins.

Rounding up

Some of the engine OEMs also announced deals during the trade days, including Pratt & Whitney and MTU Aero Engines, which received orders worth $1.75bn. The LOT A220 order included PW1500G GTF powerplants, while Frontier Airlines bought 91 of the engines. Wizz Air signed for 177, although earlier this year CEO József Váradi appeared to lean towards the CFM LEAP engine, as the GTF is causing his airline issues, leading to aircraft on the ground, effectively creating a two-year hold on his growth plans. But at Paris, Váradi said he was happy to continue with P&W, noting "it is a bit like a marriage, you have ups and downs".

Rolls-Royce left Paris with orders for 142 Trent XWBs, resulting from the A350 sales. Behind the scenes, the engine constructor will have sounded out the market for its smaller version of the UltraFan turbofan. It's keen to re-enter the narrowbody market, but there is strong competition from CFM with the RISE open rotor, and Pratt & Whitney with an updated GTF.

In other news, French start-up Aura Aero now has 650 pre-orders for its hybrid-electric ERA 19-seater, after announcing 47 firm and 45 options during the show. The first flight of the prototype is scheduled for 2027, with four other aircraft being prepared to join the flight test campaign. While targeting mostly smaller regional operators, CEO Jérémy Caussade said he thinks his aircraft is ideally suited to meet demand for sustainable aviation.

The topic of sustainability was a little less prominent in Paris this year as there was more talk about tariffs and geopolitical tensions; most evident with the blocking off of the Israeli trade stands showcasing weapons. This could be seen across the air show, unless your eyes were solely focused on the commercial aircraft... **AW**

All change at Aurigny

aurigny
Alderney

GUERNSEY-BASED AURIGNY Air Services is to lease a pair of de Havilland Canada DHC-6-300 Twin Otters from Isles of Scilly Skybus. Beginning on November 1, the aircraft will operate passenger routes from Alderney to Guernsey and Southampton, following a multi-year extension to Aurigny's Public Service Obligation contract.

Painted in the Guernsey carrier's colours, the aircraft – which are to be supplied under a contract covering aircraft, maintenance, crew training and insurance – will also facilitate air ambulance, mail, freight and pet travel services. Skybus will also supply replacement aircraft from within its fleet to cover periods of maintenance as part of the agreement.

The addition of the Twin Otters will see Aurigny's existing fleet of two Dornier Do228s being retired by the end of 2025. The carrier said its Do228 pilots will be provided with the opportunity to re-train to operate the new Twin Otter fleet or transition onto the ATR 72-600.

Nico Bezuidenhout, chief executive at Aurigny, said: "The new air service model is a win-win for the Bailiwick – it strengthens Alderney's vital air links with more resilience in the fleet while also delivering better long-term value – helping to secure the future of these vital air services for our communities."

Jonathan Hinkles, managing director of Skybus, said: "We're delighted to be announcing this new long-term contract. The new arrangement will bring together nearly 100 years' experience of island air services in Aurigny and Skybus to deliver for the Alderney community and at the same time strengthen our existing long-standing business in the Isles of Scilly." (Photo Skybus)

Iberia's €6bn investment

IN A presentation from Madrid on June 18, attended by *Airliner World*, Marco Sansavini, Iberia's chairman and CEO, announced a sweeping €6bn investment in the airline's future, of which €4.2bn will be spent on new aircraft.

The growth strategy for the airline, which currently operates 45 long-haul aircraft comprising three Airbus A321XLRs, 20 A330s and 22 A350-900s, will increase this number to 70. The new aircraft will include the delivery of nine A350-900s and five A321XLRs by 2030, with the latter fleet dedicated to the American market. The remaining 11 aircraft, likely but unconfirmed as coming from IAG's pool of recently ordered A330-900s, are to be delivered from 2030 onwards. Concurrently, it is looking to update the short-haul fleet with the addition of two A320neos and a pair of A321neos in 2026-2027, with 85% of the fleet expected to be neo-powered by 2028.

Much of the increased capacity from the new aircraft will go to North and Latin America, potentially increasing existing services to the US, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and Chile. The airline recently announced new routes to Orlando, Fortaleza and Recife, to which Sansavini added Monterrey, Philadelphia and Toronto – the first time it has connected to Canada. The Latin American market is a region where Iberia believes it is a leader and expects continued growth of around 5%.

Long-haul cabins will be updated with retrofits, including the A330-200 and A330-300s "to make them more comfortable, more attractive, and offer improved connectivity", prior to the arrival of any new A330-900s. Narrowbody overhead baggage compartments will be increased in size.

Since 2012 when posting a €351m operating loss, the dial has gradually turned the other way, climbing to a €1bn operating profit in 2024, creating the 12-15% operating margin needed to make the €6bn investment possible. Sansavini, who took on his current roles in April 2024 and has been with the airline since 2012, also outlined plans to increase employee numbers, expecting to hire an average of 1,000 new employees per year throughout the duration of the 2030 Flight Plan.

Ryanair boosts **engine pool**

RYANAIR HAS agreed a deal with CFM to purchase an additional 30 CFM International LEAP-1B engines to increase its spares bank to 120 powerplants and improve its "operational resilience". The airline said the engines "have a list price of $500m", and will be delivered over the next two years. The LEAP-1Bs will support the existing fleet of 210 Boeing 737 MAX 8200 aircraft, plus its 737-10s that are due to start arriving in 2027. By the mid 2030s, the airline is predicting a fleet size of 800 CFM-powered aircraft, flying 300 million passengers annually.

Michael O'Leary, Group CEO, said: "These latest technology CFM engines reduce fuel consumption and CO_2 emissions per seat by up to 20% when installed on our 737 MAX fleet, which will further widen Ryanair's cost leadership over competitor airlines in Europe."

in brief

London/Luton-based **easyJet** has released 22 new routes from 12 UK airports for the upcoming winter season. The release includes the first-ever connections from Belfast/International to Rovaniemi in Lapland, as well as Aberdeen to Paris/Charles de Gaulle.

TAP Air Portugal and **Turkish Airlines** are expanding their long-standing codeshare agreement, offering passengers greater flexibility to book flights on the carriers' shared networks, including Brazil, Morocco, Qatar, Mauritius, and Turkey. The Portuguese flag carrier has also announced the resumption of flights between Funchal and Faro after a 22-year hiatus. The route will be flown twice a week by an Embraer E190.

After integrating **ITA Airways** into its portfolio earlier this year, **Lufthansa** has continued its "rapid integration" by making long-haul codeshares available from July 1. The move will mean customers will be able to combine flights from Lufthansa, SWISS, Austrian Airlines and Brussels Airlines into the Italian carrier's long-haul operations.

Air France-KLM has signed a strategic cooperation memorandum of understanding with still-to-launch **Riyadh Air** aimed at improving connectivity for passengers travelling between Riyadh, Paris, Amsterdam and destinations globally. The partnership will focus on strengthening network connectivity and maximising future opportunities through Riyadh Air's hub in the Saudi Arabian capital and Air France-KLM's Paris/Charles de Gaulle and Amsterdam/Schiphol airport hubs.

Norwegian Air Shuttle is to purchase 11 CFM LEAP-1B engines from the powerplant manufacturer to support its "growing fleet of modern Boeing 737 MAX aircraft". Deliveries will take place in 2027 and 2028 and will "secure the operational resilience of the airline in a cost-efficient manner". The airline carried 2.1 million passengers in May and now operates six MAX 8s in its 129-strong 737 fleet.

Air Serbia carried more than 1.5 million passengers in the first five months of 2025, an uplift of 6% on the same period last year, in which it also operated 1,000 additional flights. During June the airline also inaugurated new routes to Mykonos in Greece, Alghero in Sardinia and Tbilisi in Georgia. The airline operates 29 aircraft and offers 73 year-round and 18 seasonal routes from its Belgrade base.

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Aeroflot announces new engine overhaul facility

AEROFLOT IS planning to build a new engine repair shop at Moscow/Sheremetyevo to overhaul CFM International CFM56 engines. The new facility will also cater for Russia's homebuilt Aviadvigatel PD-8 and PD-14 powerplants, which will power the new Yakovlev SJ-100 and MC-21 narrowbodies. These are scheduled to begin arriving in 2026, Sergei Alexandrovsky, the airline's CEO, told the local Russian newspaper *Kommersant*.

The 28,000sq ft shop is scheduled to open in 2027 and will reach full capacity the following year, overhauling approximately 70 engines annually. It will be run by AeroTrustTechnik, a new company established by Aeroflot that is separate from its current Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) subsidiary, Aeroflot Technics. Previously, S7 Technics held the monopoly on CFM engine repairs in the country.

The Russian flag carrier and its subsidiaries, Pobeda and Rossiya Airlines, currently have around 400 CFM-powered aircraft in their fleets, including Airbus A320 Family and Boeing 737-800s and -900ERs.

Alexandrovsky has also said that the airline expects to finalise settlement deals with international insurers and leasing firms regarding the last 36 Western-built aircraft from a total of 228 it agreed to buy. (Photo Airbus)

Rossiya's **MC-21 focus**

ROSSIYA AIRLINES, part of the Aeroflot Group, is to focus its fleet around the Yakovlev MC-21-300. In an interview on Russian TV, Aeroflot Group CEO Sergei Alexandrovsky said that once delivery of the Aviadvigatel PD-14-powered jets begins, the airline's other aircraft, including its widebody fleet, will be retired.

Speaking to *Russia-24*, Alexandrovsky said: "As the fleet is replaced, we plan to switch to operating only medium-haul aircraft. Currently, Rossiya Airlines operates long-haul aircraft as well. We plan to operate only MC-21 aircraft in economy and comfort class [premium economy] configurations, and now there is also a business class."

According to ch-aviation, the airline currently boasts a fleet comprising 17 Airbus A319s, eight A320s, 12 Boeing 737-800s, two 737-900ERs, nine 747-400s, five 777-300s, five 777-300ERs, and 75 SJ-100/95Bs. It currently has 34 SJ-100s and 63 MC-21-300s on order. Alexandrovsky said that the former will be leased out to other carriers following their delivery.

The Aeroflot Group intends to take delivery of over 100 MC-21-300s by 2030. Preparations for the delivery of the new jet are already underway, with plans to build up to four new hangars for the aircraft, capable of servicing up to ten MC-21s simultaneously. (Photo Yakovlev)

Air Samarkand's expansion

UZBEK CARRIER Air Samarkand has launched several new routes and increased frequencies on some of its existing services. The new links include Tashkent to Tbilisi and Batumi in Georgia, as well as from Tashkent and Samarkand to Baku in Azerbaijan. The Georgian routes, which commenced in May, will be operated twice a week and three times a week, respectively. Meanwhile, the Tashkent-Baku route will be flown weekly and twice weekly from Samarkand.

The airline also increased the number of rotations on its Samarkand to Istanbul service from three to five flights per week, starting from May 26. The airline had also planned to add an additional weekly service to its once-weekly Samarkand to Tel Aviv route, beginning on July 3. However, it remains to be seen if this will be implemented due to the ongoing tensions in Israel.

Zafar Butayev, CEO of Air Samarkand, said: "These latest route developments will support growing customer demand for new and enhanced services on our Air Samarkand route network. All provide connections where we have seen rising demand or identified clear opportunities to establish new routes for tourist, pilgrim and business travellers. We are meeting increased demand for convenient and competitive direct services to link our historic city of Samarkand and Tashkent with important neighbouring markets and destinations further afield."

Air Samarkand launched operations in December 2023 with a former China Airlines Airbus A330-300 and has since added an Airbus A321ceo and A321neo to its fleet. (Photo Air Samarkand)

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Royal Jordanian fleet upgrade

ROYAL JORDANIAN welcomed its first Airbus A320neo from aircraft lessor Avolon, in a handover at the Airbus facility in Toulouse on May 27. The aircraft, JY-RAD (c/n 12304), is the first of eight A320neos scheduled for delivery to the Amman-based flag carrier over the next year. Configured with 180 all-economy seats, it will be used on short- and medium-haul regional services. Future deliveries will include a range of cabin layouts, with some A321neos featuring lie-flat business class seating.

The airline currently operates 29 aircraft and has targeted a fleet of 41 airframes by 2028, focusing on newer, more efficient types. Dublin-based Avolon has a long-standing relationship with Royal Jordanian, already having two Boeing 787-8 Dreamliners placed with the airline and providing all eight aircraft under the latest agreement.

Although this aircraft is the first A320neo to be delivered into service with the airline, it previously received JY-RAA (c/n 12292) and JY-RAB (c/n 12247), last November and December respectively. Both aircraft, configured with 12 business and 138 economy seats, were parked at Toulouse/Francazal on delivery. (Photo Avolon)

ROYAL JORDANIAN
1st A320neo

Mango renaissance?

MANGO AIRLINES, the South African low-cost carrier based at Johannesburg/OR Tambo has said it is in the final stages of negotiating with an investor to restart operations. Launched in 2006, it operated various domestic routes and a solitary international connection to Zanzibar, using a fleet primarily comprising Boeing 737-800s. A subsidiary of South African Airways, it was placed into business rescue in August 2021 and the parent carrier said it "remains focused on its own strategic objectives and operational commitments, separate from Mango."

The man who has been leading the negotiation process, Sipho Sono, was recently quoted in South African media as saying: "The investor will be buying the intellectual property, the brand, which is Mango, and the loyal customer base, which previously had a good experience with Mango Airlines. The planes and so forth would be leased independently so there are no planes to be sold. We are busy with trying to conclude a transaction that will then allow the investor to finalise its own business plan. The timelines and the dates will be announced in the future."

Welcome to Syria

AIRLINES ARE returning to Syria, with scheduled flights recently announced by Emirates, flynas, Jazeera Airways, and Romanian low-cost operator Dan Air. The relaunch of operations, in many cases after more than a decade, follows improvements in regional security after the overthrow of the Assad regime.

Emirates confirmed its return to the Syrian capital, after a 13-year hiatus, with thrice-weekly Boeing 777-200LR flights to Damascus beginning on July 16, becoming daily by late October. In June, Saudi low-cost carrier flynas restarted operations to Damascus from Riyadh and Jeddah, becoming the first Saudi airline to connect the two countries in 12 years. Kuwaiti low-cost carrier Jazeera Airways has announced plans to resume flights to Damascus subject to approval. Romanian airline Dan Air inaugurated Bucharest-Damascus flights on June 15, becoming the sole European carrier to operate scheduled services to Syria, coming after formal clearances and bilateral agreements were secured from both Romanian and Syrian authorities. The route will operate four times per week using Airbus A320-200s. (Photo Airbus/Alexandre Doumenjou)

EU updates airline blacklist

THE EUROPEAN Commission (EC) has updated its Air Safety List, adding all of Tanzania's carriers to the list of airlines banned from operating within the European Union (EU). The decision follows a safety assessment that raised serious concerns about regulatory and operational oversight in the East African country. According to EU aviation experts, the civil aviation authorities in Tanzania failed to demonstrate the ability to enforce compliance with international safety standards. Key issues included a lack of qualified personnel, ineffective oversight of flight operations and airworthiness, and persistent non-compliance with international norms by both regulators and operators. The EC previously banned Air Tanzania from operating to the EU in December 2024. Elsewhere, Suriname, in South America, was also added to the list, which now comprises 169 airlines around the world deemed unsafe to operate in EU airspace.

Embraer showcases Africa's potential

AN EMBRAER report has highlighted the need for better intra-African air connectivity, including the role regional air travel can play in unlocking economic growth across the continent. The study draws a sharp contrast between Africa's population and relatively minor role in global aviation, containing 18% of the world's inhabitants but accounting for just 2.1% of global air traffic, according to IATA data.

The report points to this imbalance as a barrier to economic progress and identifies specific strategies to address the shortfall in direct routes and flight frequencies within the region. It states 64% of intra-African city pairs are served by fewer than seven flights a week, while many routes remain unserved, forcing travellers through hubs – in some cases, as far as away as Europe or the Middle East. Based on the past decade of air traffic data, the manufacturer identified 45 intra-African routes that could sustain multiple weekly direct services with a 100-seat aircraft. The top ten routes could support at least three nonstop flights per week and the report predicted an increase in passenger volumes if direct services are launched.

European expansion for flydubai

FLYDUBAI HAS announced the addition of four new European destinations to its network, to become the first UAE-based airline to operate direct services from Dubai/International to Chișinău, Iași, Riga, and Vilnius. Operations to Chișinău and Iași begin on September 17 and 19 respectively, followed by Vilnius and Riga on December 11 and 12, increasing the airlines European network to 35 destinations across 20 countries. The expansion marks its first foray to the Baltics and Ghaith Al Ghaith, flydubai CEO, said the additions were a sign that the carrier was committed to opening up "underserved markets". Iași becomes the second Romanian city served by the carrier, following the launch of its Bucharest operation in 2012.

The new services coincide with the launch of the airline's ab initio pilot training programme, developed in collaboration with overseas training organisations. With more than 125 Boeing 737 MAX aircraft and 30 Boeing 787s on order, the carrier is anticipating continued demand for pilots in the coming years. (Photo Boeing)

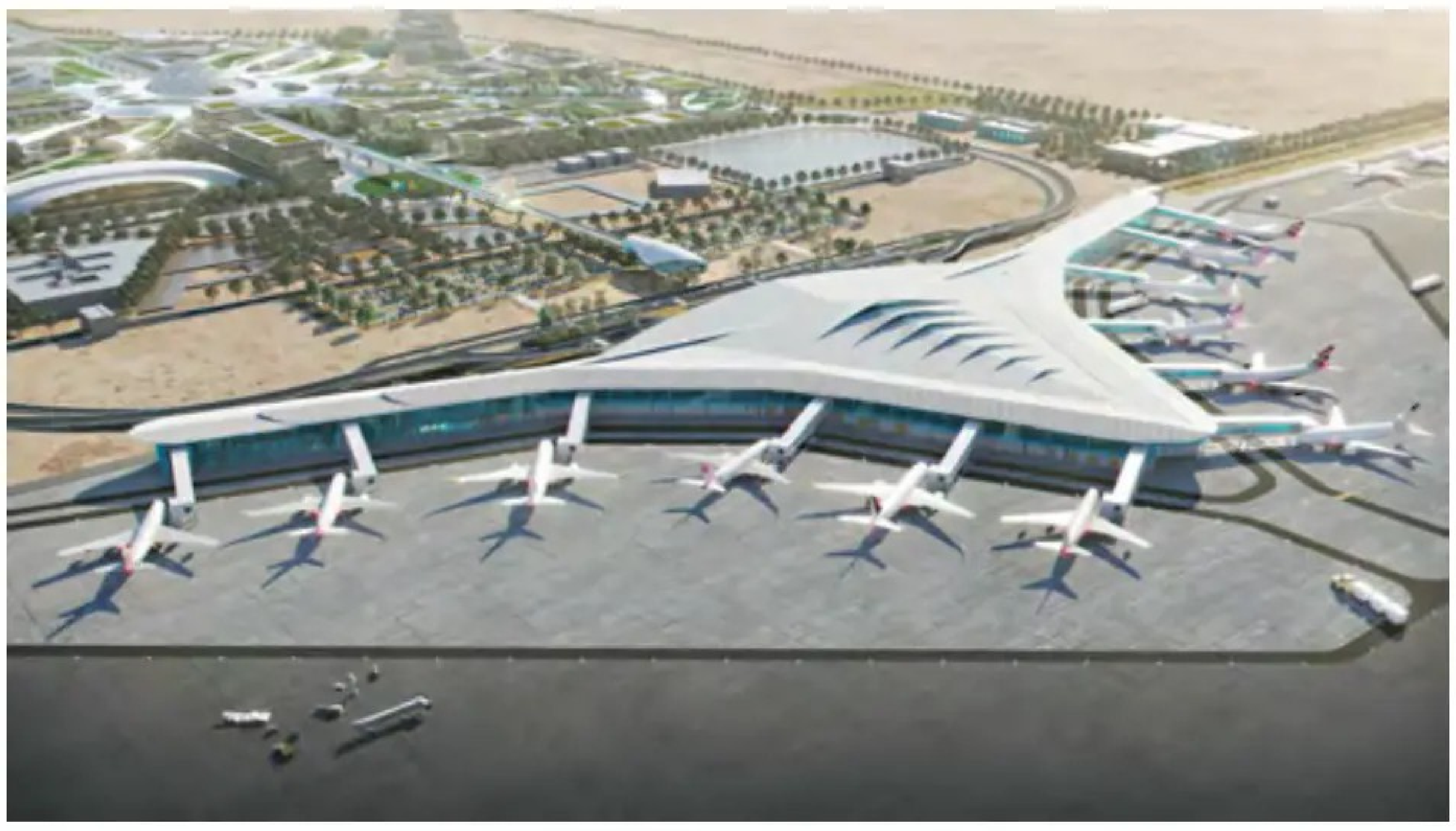
A350 growth for **Emirates**

EMIRATES BEGAN the exclusive deployment of its Airbus A350 to Bahrain on June 2, as it became the first destination in its network to be served solely by the type, when flight EK835 marked the launch of a third daily service. The move forms part of the airline's continued integration of its first seven A350s, with Bahrain among a growing list of A350 destinations such as Amman, Edinburgh, and Mumbai.

Elsewhere, at the IATA AGM in New Delhi, Emirates and Air China signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to expand their interline partnership. The agreement will see both carriers explore reciprocal codeshares "on select routes across each other's networks", and enhance cargo and loyalty programme co-operation.

The Dubai-based operator recently announced the launch of two new routes to Shenzhen and Hangzhou. From July 30, it will operate 49 weekly flights to the Chinese mainland, including double dailies to Beijing and Shanghai, plus daily flights to Guangzhou. (Photo Emirates)

Benghazi Airport edges closer



LIBYA IS set to gain a new gateway in 2026 as part of a £1.3bn development in the north African country. The new Benghazi Tika International Airport will span 24km^2 and is being delivered through a collaboration between Libya's National Development Agency (NDA) and Global Builders Company, part of Terminal Group Holding.

The airport's design, by Malaysia-based NRY Architects, is said to draw inspiration from Libya's desert topography and Mediterranean coastline. The facility includes a 125,000m^2 passenger terminal and a 12,450ft runway capable of handling Airbus A380 operations. Passenger capacity is planned at 15 million per year with additional infrastructure to include a VIP terminal and cargo centre. Libya's relatively low aviation fuel costs are expected to provide a competitive advantage to airlines, particularly cargo and long-haul operators, and officials hope this will attract interest from carriers seeking to establish bases or regional operations. (Photo Vision Libya)

in brief

Ethiopian Airlines has inaugurated a new scheduled passenger service to Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, marking another step in its regional expansion. The four-times-weekly overnight rotation began on June 1, and was launched with a ceremony attended by diplomats, government officials, and airline executives. Already a cargo operator to the emirate, the new passenger flights provide an additional link between Africa and the Middle East.

Gulf Air is to take delivery of nine new Airbus aircraft – six A320neos and three A321neos – as part of a long-term leasing agreement agreed with global aircraft lessor BOC Aviation. The Bahrain-based flag carrier will receive the CFM International LEAP-1A powered narrowbodies, over a three-year period, starting this year. Jeffrey Goh, the airline's CEO said: "We are pleased to be able to enhance our fleet with these new aircraft, which will enable us to provide an even better travel experience for our passengers. This partnership with BOC Aviation underscores our commitment to modernising our operations and expanding our network."

Qatar Airways Group has reported its best-ever financial results, posting a net profit of QAR 7.85bn (£1.6bn) for the 2024-25 financial year. The Doha-based group, which includes the passenger airline, cargo division, catering, and Qatar Duty Free, saw profits jump by £348m compared to the previous year. Among the milestones was a 28% year-on-year increase in profits, completion of a terminal expansion at Hamad International Airport increasing its capacity to 65 million passengers annually, and the rollout of Starlink Wi-Fi across its Boeing 777 fleet. The group also boosted its global reach through new equity stakes in Virgin Australia (25%) and South African regional carrier Airlink (25%), and introduced Sama, an AI-based digital cabin crew.

Etihad Airways has launched new services, operated with Boeing 787 Dreamliners, fitted with 28 business class and 262 economy class seats, to Prague and Warsaw, adding the two Central European capitals to its international network. The first Prague flight landed on June 2, followed by a day later by the inaugural arrival in Warsaw. The two routes form part of an expansion that will see the addition of 16 destinations to the airline's network in 2025.

Breeze's in as Silver melts under financial pressure

BREEZE AIRWAYS opened two new routes to Key West, Florida, just 24 hours after Fort Lauderdale-based regional carrier Silver Airways abruptly ended operations.

The new routes, from Orlando and Tampa, were announced in March as the now-defunct ATR operator fought a losing battle to restructure while in Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. Indeed, Silver Airways had warned in April that its case may require conversion from Chapter 11 to Chapter 7, which would have resulted in the airline's liquidation.

After no other bidders came forward, Silver sold its assets to Greenwich, Connecticut-based Wexford Capital, which chose to end the carrier's operations. The last service – from Tampa to Fort Lauderdale – was operated on June 11.

Breeze had been steadily encroaching on Silver's turf, having announced in May that it would begin flying services to Fort Lauderdale from Akron, Ohio and Wilmington, North Carolina from this November.

At the time of its closure on June 10, Silver had a fleet of seven ATR turboprops comprising three ATR 42-600s and four of the larger 72-600 model – almost half the fleet it had started 2025 with.

Meanwhile, low-cost carrier Breeze currently boasts a fleet of 55 jets, made up of 43 Airbus A220-300s, ten Embraer E190s and a pair of E195s. It has a further 47 A220-300s on order. (Photo Airbus)

Blue sky thinking for JetBlue and United

JETBLUE AND United Airlines have announced they are to link their loyalty programmes as part of a new collaboration. United's MileagePlus customers and JetBlue's TrueBlue members will both be able to earn and use points on both carriers' services.

The tie-up, known as Blue Sky, involves each airline offering flights on one another's website and app as well as an interline agreement. The move includes JetBlue providing United access to slots at New York/JFK for up to seven daily round-trip flights out of Terminal 6 at the hub, beginning as early as 2027. As part of a net-neutral exchange, JetBlue and United will also exchange eight flight timings at Newark.

Joanna Geraghty, JetBlue CEO, said: "This collaboration with United is a bold step forward for the industry – one that brings together two customer-focused airlines to deliver more choices for travellers and value across our networks."

Geraghty continued: "United's global reach perfectly complements JetBlue's East Coast leisure network, and significantly expands the options and benefits for TrueBlue members, no matter where in the world they are travelling. This is a clear win for our customers and crew members, and supports our JetForward strategy."

JetBlue and United will continue to manage and price their networks independently, including the launch of new routes, frequencies and promotions. However, United will move some of its holiday and travel services to JetBlue's Paisly platform.

Alaska to link Seattle and Rome

ALASKA AIRLINES has confirmed it is to begin long-haul operations, stating that it plans to connect its Seattle base with Rome, Italy, from May 2026. It will be the first time that direct services between the two cities will have been offered.

The four-times-weekly link will be operated by Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners, likely drawn from the fleet of sister carrier Hawaiian Airlines. Another long-haul service, connecting Seattle/Tacoma with Tokyo/Narita, was launched in May using Hawaiian Airlines Airbus A330-200s while another rotation to Seoul/Incheon – set to begin in September – is also expected to be flown by Hawaiian jets.

Ben Minicucci, Alaska Airlines' CEO, said: "As an Italian American whose parents emigrated from Italy, this is a particularly meaningful addition to our network. Rome has been at the top of the list ever since we announced our new global gateway out of Seattle. Our guests have been asking for an easy way to get to Italy for years, and we're thrilled to provide it to people in the Northwest and beyond."

Flights are scheduled to depart Seattle at 6pm on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays, arriving in Rome at 1.45pm the following day. The return connections will depart after a two-hour turnaround.

It is not currently known which Rome airport the flight will serve, but it is understood to be Fiumicino. The route is subject to receipt of a single operating certificate from the US Federal Aviation Administration. (Photo Port of Seattle)

Tariffs could cause Spirit to cancel A320neo orders

SPIRIT AIRLINES has stated it could cancel some of its Airbus A320neo Family orders as a result of the ongoing trade war between the United States and the European Union. The US low-cost carrier recently disclosed in a quarterly report to the US Securities and Exchange Commission that the Trump administration's tariff policies could negatively impact its business as it works to achieve financial stability.

Spirit notes that the future impact of tariffs are very much subject to change, with uncertainties surrounding the rate and duration of US imposed duties. While likely a factor for all US airlines with orders for Airbus aircraft, Spirit has recently exited Chapter 11 bankruptcy restructuring.

Southwest and China Airlines fall interline

SOUTHWEST AIRLINES and China Airlines are to create an interline partnership beginning in early 2026. The two airlines struck the deal at the International Air Transport Association (IATA) annual meeting in India in early June.

Neither airline has confirmed which connections will make up the agreement. However, comments from executives at the two airlines suggest the tie-up will initially focus on Californian destinations. Andrew Watterson, Southwest Airlines' chief operating officer, said: "As the largest carrier of domestic passengers in the United States, we carry more people to, from and within California than any other airline and expect Southwest customers could benefit immediately from having access to connections overseas through China Airlines."

Kevin Chen, president at China Airlines, added: "Growing our long-haul network always has been our long-term plan. As we expand our gateway operations in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle, as well as Ontario, California, we are pleased to include Southwest as one of our partners with its unique network that further expands North American connection opportunities into the Midwest and toward the East Coast." (Photo Southwest Airlines)

Avianca adds A320neos

South American powerhouse Avianca has agreed a deal with BOC Aviation to acquire nine Airbus A320neos on long-term lease. The jets are set to be powered by CFM LEAP-1A engines with deliveries starting in 2027. Francisco Raddatz, chief procurement officer, Abra Group, which owns a shareholding in the carrier, said: "We are pleased to reaffirm our strategic relationship with BOC Aviation through this agreement. This transaction supports our fleet renewal strategy and our commitment to operating modern, fuel-efficient aircraft."

Sunwing bows out as WestJet completes merger

SUNWING HAS operated its last commercial flight following WestJet's integration of the Canadian leisure airline.

WestJet acquired Sunwing in May 2023 and spent the following 12 months integrating the carrier into its own operations, while also absorbing ultra-low-cost airline Swoop in October 2023.

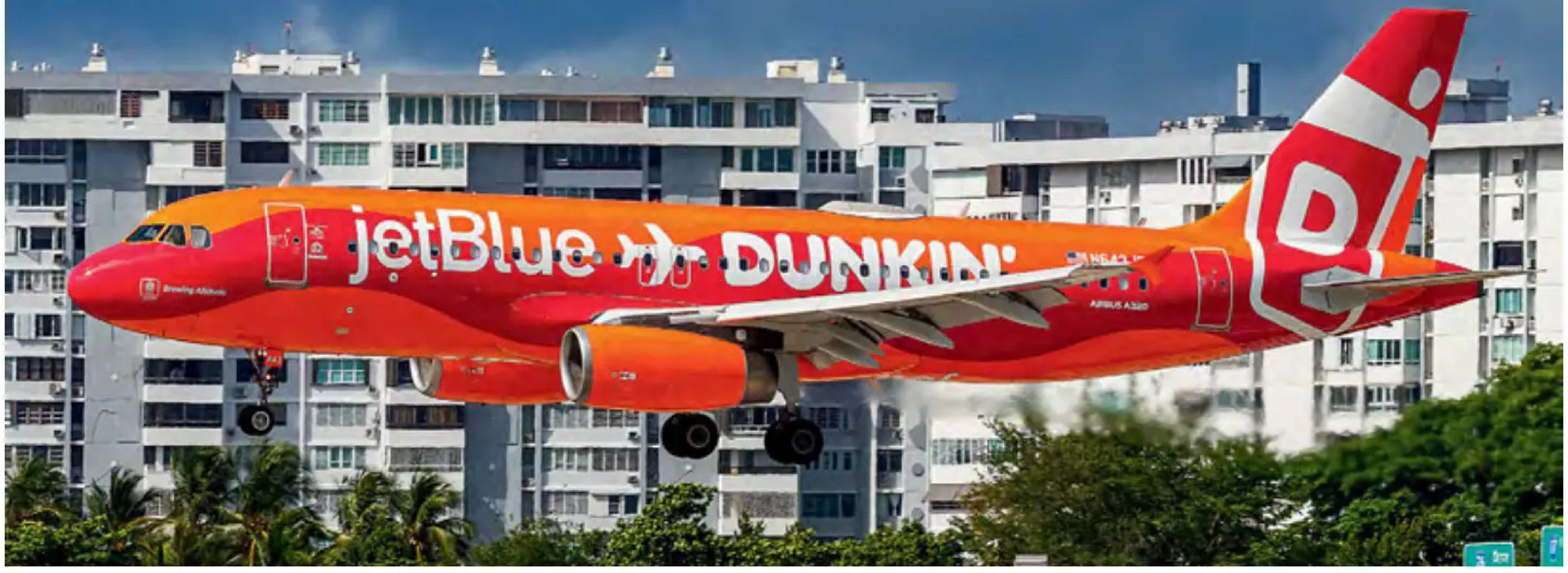
As of May 28, all three airlines and their respective aircraft, along with nine former Lynx Air Boeing 737s, had been consolidated under a single Air Operator Certificate (AOC).

While the Sunwing Airlines brand has been withdrawn, reservations can still be made through Sunwing Vacations, while WestJet is working to implement an improved end-to-end travel experience, with streamlined processes and customer-focused booking flows.

WestJet will now begin a unified narrowbody programme to reconfigure aircraft cabins to the standard WestJet interior being completed during 2025. This will ensure a consistent on-board experience for passengers, with a more diverse range of on-board product offerings, including Premium, Economy, Extended Comfort and UltraBasic seating available on all the airline's 150 Boeing 737s. (Photo WestJet)

Jetblue's sweet treat

JetBlue Airways has painted an Airbus A320-200, N643JB (c/n 2871), in this striking orange and pink livery to celebrate its partnership with Dunkin' Donuts. Renamed 'Brewing Altitude' as part of the new special colour scheme, the jet entered service between Orlando, Florida, and Washington/Reagan during May. It is the 16th A320 at the airline to wear special colours AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/MAYSONET SPOTTER



in brief

Air Canada Airbus A220-300, C-GNBN (c/n 55112), re-entered service on June 14 after more than 18 months in storage due to a shortage of Pratt & Whitney PW1000 engines. The jet, which wears a retro Trans-Canada Air Lines livery, had been stored at Winnipeg International Airport since January 10, 2024. The Canadian airline has had ongoing issues with the Geared Turbofan (GTF) powerplant, prompting it to add seven ex-Lynx Air Boeing 737 MAX 8s, a trio of which has entered service since July 2024.

Canadian regional carrier **Porter Airlines** has taken a major step forward in its international expansion, receiving approval to operate services to destinations in the Caribbean and Europe with its own aircraft. The Canadian Transport Agency has authorised the modification of the carrier's service licences, removing the codeshare-only restrictions to Costa Rica, Jamaica and the United Kingdom. In this instance, it is expected that the 'United Kingdom' refers to Caribbean destinations such as Bermuda, the Cayman Islands and the Turks and Caicos, such is the range of Porter's Embraer E195-E2s. (Photo Porter Airlines)

United Airlines has become the first US carrier to serve Greenland, launching a twice-weekly rotation from Newark/Liberty to Nuuk on June 14. The 737 MAX 8-operated link has been facilitated by a recent runway extension and other infrastructure work at the Greenlandic hub. The seasonal link – due to last until September 23 – is only the second occasion on which there have been nonstop flights between the two nations, the first being Air Greenland's short-lived Boeing 757-200 flights from Kangerlussuaq to Baltimore in 2007.

Azul Brazilian Airlines has axed three routes to Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International just weeks after announcing that it had filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in the United States. The longest of the three connections is an eight-hour, Airbus A330-operated link to Belo Horizonte in Brazil, while Fort Lauderdale will also lose its Manaus service, which was typically flown by A320s. The Brazilian carrier will also close its four-weekly rotation to Willemstad/Curacao International, also flown by A320s. The three links are all set to be closed during August.

Gatwick-bound Air India 787 crashes

INVESTIGATORS IN India are probing the fatal crash of an Air India Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner which came down in a residential area shortly after take-off from Ahmedabad on June 12. Of the 242 people on board, only one passenger survived – while at least 38 were killed on the ground, making it one of the deadliest air accidents in India for decades.

The 787, VT-ANB (c/n 36279), took off from the Indian city bound for London/Gatwick at 1.39pm local time. Within moments, reports suggest a mayday call was heard from the aircraft and within 40 seconds, it had lost altitude and crashed less than a mile away from the runway. Flightradar24 reported its altitude peaked at 625ft.

Both the flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorders of the aircraft were quickly recovered as investigators from India's Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), assisted by teams from the UK and US, arrived to begin their investigation.

The crash marks the first hull loss for a Boeing 787 Dreamliner, which until now had an impeccable safety record, having just surpassed one billion passengers since its entry into service in October 2011.

VT-ANB
एयर इंडिया

VT-ANB was delivered to the flag carrier in January 2014 and according to ch-aviation, had racked up around 38,000 flight hours across more than 7,200 flights. (Photo AirTeamImages.com/Alex Peake)

IndiGo adds more A350s, plans **European expansion**

INDIAN LOW-COST carrier IndiGo is ramping up its widebody ambitions, converting 30 of its purchase rights for Airbus A350-900s into a firm order. The move builds on the airline's April 2024 order for 30 A350-900s, which included rights for 70 more. Deliveries from the original agreement are due to begin in 2027. The latest commitment, confirmed through a newly signed memorandum of understanding with Airbus, increases IndiGo's firm A350 order to a total of 60 aircraft. All will be powered by Rolls-Royce Trent XWB engines.

IndiGo anticipates surpassing a fleet size of 600 aircraft by 2030. The airline has signed an agreement with Norse Atlantic Airways for the damp lease of six Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft, deliveries of which will be completed by early 2026, before the arrival of the A350s in 2027. This financial year will also see the A321XLR join IndiGo's fleet, opening the door to new long range international markets not previously connected directly to India.

Separately, IndiGo, Delta Air Lines, Air France-KLM and Virgin Atlantic have announced plans to build a partnership connecting India with Europe and North America. "By linking IndiGo's extensive domestic network with Delta's strength in North America and the transatlantic, the extensive reach of Air France-KLM in Europe and North America, and the UK, and transatlantic presence of Virgin Atlantic, the partnership is poised to offer travellers broader access, smoother journeys, and a more consistent experience across continents," the carrier said.

Qantas to close Jetstar Asia

Jet
Jetstar
9V-JSU

AUSTRALIAN FLAG carrier Qantas has announced the closure of its Singapore-based low-cost subsidiary, Jetstar Asia. The airline group said it had faced "growing challenges" with rising supplier costs, high airport fees, and intensified competition in the region. This, Qantas said, "fundamentally challenged the low-cost airline's ability to deliver returns comparable to the stronger performing core markets". Jetstar Asia is expected to post a loss this year. Its final day of operation was due to be July 31, 2025.

The closure only affects the intra-Asia routes operated by the airline from Singapore. It does not impact Jetstar Airways' domestic and international operations in Australia and New Zealand or Jetstar Japan, and Jetstar Airways will continue to fly from Australia to Asia. Qantas Group CEO Vanessa Hudson said: "Jetstar Asia has been a pioneering force in the Asian aviation market for more than 20 years, making air travel accessible to millions of customers across Southeast Asia... This is a very tough day for them. Despite their best efforts, we have seen some of Jetstar Asia's supplier costs increase by up to 200%, which has materially changed its cost base."

Jetstar Asia's 13 "mid-life" Airbus A320 aircraft will be redeployed to Australia and New Zealand to upgrade and grow the fleet in those markets, including to accelerate fleet renewal in Qantas' regional operations that service the resources sector in Western Australia. (Photo Bob Lee)

Freight focus for **Ascend**

ASCEND AIRWAYS Malaysia – the new Kuala Lumpur-based airline – aims to begin cargo operations by November 2025, followed by passenger services, with the first Boeing 737-800 freighter due in Q3 2025. The carrier, which has reached Phase 3 of its Air Operator Certificate (AOC) process, plans to induct two passenger aircraft by early 2026.

CEO Germal Singh Khera emphasised that the start-up airline's goal is to support local carriers and meet the growing demand in the Asia-Pacific region. Ascend will offer ACMI and charter solutions across both cargo and passenger markets.

Alastair Willson, CEO of UK-based Ascend Airways, the sister company of Ascend Airways Malaysia, said: "[We] remain focused and committed to deliver flexible ACMI solutions and develop [our] seasonal fleet strategy between the UK and Malaysia and the Asia-Pacific region. ACMI is a proven solution for airlines seeking to efficiently meet dynamic travel demand and unlock new revenue opportunities. We are resolute in our aspirations to be leaders in this space."

Virgin Australia goes long-haul

BRISBANE-BASED VIRGIN Australia has returned to long-haul international flying with the launch of its inaugural Sydney–Doha service. The new link uses Qatar Airways' Boeing 777 aircraft and forms part of a new partnership between the two carriers. It is being complemented by Brisbane flights which commenced on June 19, Perth on June 26, and with Melbourne to follow in December 2025. By the end of the year, the alliance will grow the capacity of flights from Australia to Qatar to 2.65 million seats a year.

Virgin Australia pilots and cabin crew are being offered secondment opportunities with Qatar Airways. The Aussie carrier's CEO Dave Emerson said the service marked "the beginning of a new era for Virgin Australia and for international travel from Australia". (Photo Virgin Australia/James D Morgan/ Getty Images)

Vietjet doubles **A330neo commitments**

VIETNAMESE LOW-COST carrier Vietjet has placed a new firm order with Airbus for 20 widebody A330-900 aircraft. The country's largest private airline said the order would support its ongoing international network expansion, enabling it to increase flights on high-capacity routes across the Asia-Pacific region, as well as to introduce new future long-haul services to Europe.

The new contract doubles Vietjet's firm orders for the A330neo to 40 aircraft. The low-cost Hanoi-based airline has 96 A320neo Family aircraft on order, to supplement its all-Airbus fleet, which comprises 115 A320 and A321 aircraft and seven A330-300s, used on routes to Australia, India and Kazakhstan.

This deal came before the Paris Air Show where Vietjet signed a memorandum of understanding with Airbus for 100 A321neos and options for a further 50. See the Paris Air Show report on page 6 for more details.

Air Niugini tops up A220 order

THE NATIONAL carrier of Papua New Guinea, Air Niugini, has signed a firm order with Airbus for two more A220-100s. This follows an initial order in 2023 for six aircraft. In addition, the carrier has lease agreements signed for three A220-300s from US-based lessor Azorra. The maiden A220 for the airline – dubbed the 'People's Balus' – entered final assembly at Airbus facilities in Mirabel, Canada, in June. The aircraft is planned for delivery to Port Moresby in September, which will coincide with Papua New Guinea's 50th Independence Anniversary celebrations.

Air Niugini's 11 A220s will come in two variants – the A220-300 seating 138 customers, and the smaller A220-100 series with 114 seats. The A220s will replace the airline's long-serving Fokker 100/70 fleet on domestic routes, and eventually the Boeing 737s. While the initial focus is to upgrade domestic services, the A220 is also capable of servicing all Air Niugini international destinations as well as some potential new routes, which the airline said it is studying. (Photo Airbus)

Air Niugini

in brief

Air New Zealand will boost capacity to North America by 8% this year, adding over 34,000 seats, including 20,500 in premium cabins. Auckland–Los Angeles sees the biggest uplift, while routes to San Francisco, Vancouver, and Houston also benefit. Up to seven newly retrofitted 787s will enter service by year-end, offering a refreshed inflight experience.

Flag carrier **Air India** has agreed interline partnerships with four airlines in emerging markets across Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The partnerships – with airBaltic, Bulgaria Air, Cyprus Airways, and Uzbekistan Airways – will provide Air India passengers with options to reach 16 more destinations across six countries served by the carriers more seamlessly. Air India will also provide access to more than 30 Indian cities to the customers of the new partner airlines.

Embraer has established a subsidiary in New Delhi to strengthen its footprint in India's commercial aviation sector. With fewer than 50 aircraft operating in the country – across commercial, defence and business aviation – the Brazilian manufacturer says it wants to deepen regional connectivity through its E-Jets family, which could support underserved secondary and tertiary cities. The company highlights Star Air's all-Embraer fleet of E175 and ERJ145s as the kind of model it seeks to replicate.

China Southern Airlines and **Vietnam Airlines** will launch a joint venture starting on August 1, 2025, the first of its kind between carriers from China and Vietnam. The partnership, approved by both governments, includes co-ordinated schedules, codesharing, and interline check-in for up to three connecting flights. It builds on a codeshare agreement dating back to 2010. The airlines currently operate over 160 weekly flights between major cities in both countries.

Hainan Airlines received its first Airbus A321neo on June 19, becoming the type's newest operator in China. The aircraft, B-32LY (c/n 12518), arrived at the airline's Haikou/Meilan hub after a ferry flight from Airbus' facility in Hamburg, via Muscat. Powered by CFM International LEAP-1A engines, the jet has a two-class configuration with eight business and 196 economy class seats.

Chances of A380 revival remain "extremely low"

THE PROSPECT of Airbus restarting production of the A380 remains highly unlikely, according to the CEO of Airbus Commercial Aircraft, Christian Scherer. Responding to a question from *Airliner World* during a media briefing in Toulouse during June, Scherer reiterated the manufacturer's stance on the superjumbo's future.

"I'm old enough to have learned never to say never, but don't read anything into that," he said. "The likelihood of a revamped A380 is extremely low. Someone used the expression, which I borrowed: the door is closed but it isn't locked; [the chances are] pretty low."

The remarks echo similar comments made by Scherer in 2024 and reinforce Airbus's long-held view that a return to A380 production is commercially unviable. The programme ended in 2021 after 251 aircraft were delivered.

Although several major operators – including Emirates – have sizeable A380 fleets, Airbus continues to see the market shifting towards more flexible, fuel-efficient twin-engine widebodies. Scherer's wording leaves a trace of ambiguity – but for now, any talk of a second-generation A380 remains firmly hypothetical. (Photo Airbus)

Manufacturers forecast **doubling of fleet**

BOEING, AIRBUS and Embraer each released their 20-year commercial market forecasts ahead of the Paris Air Show, projecting strong long-term growth in global air traffic and aircraft demand through to 2044.

Boeing predicts demand for 43,600 deliveries. Passenger traffic is expected to grow by 4.2% annually, more than doubling by 2044. Boeing foresees 33,285 single-aisles, 7,815 widebodies, 1,545 regional jets and 955 freighters. It estimates that 80% of deliveries will replace existing aircraft. Emerging markets will account for over half the global fleet by 2044, up from 40% today.

Airbus's forecast is similarly sized predicting demand for 43,420 new aircraft, including 34,250 single-aisles and 9,170 widebodies. It expects passenger traffic to grow by 3.6% annually, driven by rising GDP, urbanisation and an expanding middle class. Around 44% of new deliveries will replace older jets. Airbus identifies domestic India, emerging Asia-China and the Middle East-Asia as key growth flows, with upsizing expected as traffic increases. It also foresees the global fleet doubling to more than 49,000 aircraft, spurring demand for pilots, technicians and support services, including predictive maintenance and connectivity.

Embraer focuses on aircraft up to 150 seats, forecasting 10,500 new deliveries – 8,720 jets and 1,780 turboprops. Global passenger traffic is expected to grow 3.9% annually, with China leading regional growth at 5.7%. Embraer highlights the need for flexible, right-sized fleets to support regional access and development goals.

While differing in scope and emphasis, all three forecasts point to a doubling of the fleet and underline aviation's resilience and evolving role in a shifting global economy.

Airbus to certify 160-seat A220

AIRBUS WILL this year launch certification efforts for a higher-density version of the A220-300 capable of accommodating up to 160 passengers, responding to what it describes as strong market interest in optimising the type's capacity and efficiency.

"We are starting 160-passenger certification," Jean-François Parent, chief engineer for the A220 Family, told *Airliner World* at a recent press briefing. "There is a strong request from the market to take a -300 and put 160 passengers in it to really maximise the usage and get the fuel efficiency and CO_2 reduction – and more passengers."

To achieve certification at the new capacity, Airbus will add an additional pair of overwing emergency exits. The proposed configuration would boost the A220-300's utility on short-haul, high-density routes, but some operators are cautious about the trade-offs. Among them is airBaltic, the A220-300 launch customer and now second-largest operator of the type.

"Currently, I would prioritise keeping our existing configuration over squeezing in seats," said Pauls Cālītis, the interim chief executive officer of airBaltic.

The Latvian carrier's boss emphasised that its A220s are used on a range of missions – not just short hops, but longer flights of up to seven hours: "You could have a high density [layout] for short flights, but again, we have a lot of flights that are much longer... so a 160-seat configuration probably would be quite restrictive in terms of seat pitch," he noted.

While not ruling out a future shift, he added: "It's not something that has been yet proposed to us specifically. It also is something that we haven't fully evaluated. I never say never... but again, our priority is to maintain our efficiency with the single layout we currently have."

Meanwhile, speculation continues around a potential stretched version of the A220 –sometimes dubbed the A220-500 – which would offer additional capacity through a longer fuselage. Parent confirmed the platform has the capability for such a development, but played down its immediacy.

"The focus today is really on the ramp-up of the -100 and -300," he said. "We're focusing on operational reliability and improving the performance of the aircraft in service. The platform has the capability, for sure... Today it's not a priority. It's more 'when' than 'if', I would say." (Photo Airbus/ F Lancelot/Master Films)

AIRBUS A220-300
A220

ATR's power play

TOULOUSE-BASED ATR and Pratt & Whitney Canada have announced a new collaboration to develop advanced propulsion technologies for regional turboprop aircraft. The initiative will build on the capabilities of the PW127XT engine and support the feasibility study of ATR's future aircraft concept, the 'EVO'.

Key areas of focus include improving thermal efficiency to reduce fuel burn, applying advanced materials to extend engine life and reduce maintenance costs, as well as refining aircraft aerodynamics through improved engine and nacelle integration.

The collaboration is centred around building on the performance of the Pratt & Whitney Canada PW127XT-M engine, which powers more than 60 ATR aircraft and has accumulated over 300,000 flight hours since entering service in 2022. The engine offers 3% better fuel efficiency, 20% lower maintenance costs and 40% improved time on wing compared with previous models.

"As we work together on further improvements to the PW127XT-M, we are shaping the technologies that will drive the next generation of regional aircraft," said ATR CEO Nathalie Tarnaud Laude. "This is a key step in our ATR 'EVO' concept."

Maria Della Posta, president of Pratt & Whitney Canada, added: "Our strong collaboration with ATR highlights our commitment to innovation in regional aviation. Together, we continue to lead the way with technologies tailored to the needs of this vital market." (Photo ATR)

Airbus Deliveries

1st A321neo

Kuwait Airways accepted delivery of Airbus A321neo, 9K-AQA (c/n 12345), on May 9, and is pictured here during the handover in Toulouse. After a ferry flight to Kuwait on May 15, it entered service on May 21, becoming the first of the type to be welcomed into the airline's 27-strong fleet AIRBUS/HERVÉ GOUSSÉ

Airbus delivered the following aircraft in May:

A220-100	1	Comlux
A220-300	4	Azorra [Croatia Airlines]; Breeze Airways (2); Qantas Airways [National Jet Systems]
A319neo	1	Air China
A320neo	11	LATAM; BOC Aviation [Condor]; CALC [Royal Jordanian]; NAS Aviation Services [Transavia]; Avolon [FlyArystan]; Avolon [Royal Jordanian]; BOC Aviation [My Freighter]; China Eastern Airlines; SAS; Chengdu Airlines; BOCOM Leasing [Spring Airlines]
A321neo	28	Qantas Airways [Jetstar Airways]; Frontier Airlines; British Airways (2); Kuwait Airways; Wizz Air (6); China Eastern Airlines (2); Delta Air Lines; Aer Lingus; Swiss International Air Lines; Spirit Airlines; IndiGo; Avolon [Jet2.com]; Viva Aerobus; CDB Leasing [Aegean Airlines]; China Airlines; JetBlue Airways; China Southern Airlines (2); KLM Royal Dutch Airlines; SMBC Aviation Capital [Air New Zealand]; SMBC Aviation Capital [Icelandair]
A330-900	3	Delta Air Lines (3)
A350-900	3	Emirates (2); Turkish Airlines
Total	51	
Annual total to date	243	

Airbus plots A319neo phase out

THE AIRBUS A319neo may be nearing the end of the runway, with the manufacturer preparing to phase out the smallest member of its A320neo Family.

Speaking during a recent media briefing, Marc Guinot, the A320 Family chief engineer, acknowledged that the type is declining in relevance: "There is not much more in the orderbook, even if we know it's an important product," he told *Airliner World*. "We could think of stopping the A319 at a point in time, but to do this we should first have an A320neo with a very good level of performance for high altitude airports."

The A319neo has found a niche with airlines operating from high-altitude airfields – particularly in western China – thanks to its ability to carry high payloads from airports up to 14,500ft above sea level. Guinot confirmed Airbus is working to enhance the A320neo's high-altitude performance with the aim of matching or surpassing the A319neo's capabilities by the end of this decade.

"We are preparing the A320neo to be as good as the A319neo in terms of percentage of maximum payload it can carry from 14,500ft airports," he said. "We also have some corporate jet customers who like the A319 and we need to make the A320neo as attractive to them too."

According to Airbus's May 2025 orders and deliveries data, just 57 A319neos have been ordered to date, of which 32 have been delivered. Of these, 13 went to Tibet Airlines, nine to China Southern Airlines, and one to West Air – all of which have now received their full allocation. Air China has taken delivery of just one of its ten aircraft, while a further 14 (as yet undelivered) aircraft are attributed to undisclosed customers. The corporate and government sector accounts for ten of the total orders, eight of which have been delivered.

"All of this is prospective," Guinot noted. "It's normal and we are anticipating the future. But it's true that the A319 is decaying, let's say, in terms of orders and in terms of priority for Airbus. But we are thinking about the customers who like it... and we're trying to make the A320neo as capable as it." (Photo Airbus/H Gousse/Master Films)

Boeing Deliveries

Allegiant Air accepted delivery of Boeing 737 MAX 8200, N820NV (c/n 67996), on May 13, moving it to Phoenix/Goodyear the same day for storage. The CFM International LEAP-1B-powered, all-economy 190-seat aircraft was one of three the airline received in May, increasing its 737 MAX 8200 fleet to 12 examples V1IMAGES.COM/NICK SHEEDER

Boeing delivered the following aircraft in May:

737 MAX	31	AerCap (3); Air India (2); Air Lease Corporation; Alaska Airlines (4); Allegiant Air (3); American Airlines (2); BOC Aviation Limited; Copa Airlines (2); flydubai; GOL Linhas Aereas; Jeju Air; Southwest Airlines (2); United Airlines (7); WestJet
767-300F	1	FedEx Express
777F	5	Atlas Air Worldwide Holdings; China Airlines; Emirates; Ethiopian Airlines; FedEx Express
787-9	7	American Airlines; Avolon; El Al; Qatar Airways (3); United Airlines
Total	44	
Annual total to date	213	

Western Sydney Airport adds third carrier

AIR NEW Zealand has been revealed as the third major operator of the new Western Sydney International Airport, which is scheduled to open in late 2026. The deal between the flag carrier and airport operator was signed on June 11. Air New Zealand announced its intention to commence operations at the new facility from its Auckland hub in mid-2027. It joins Qantas, plus its low-cost subsidiary Jetstar, and Singapore Airlines, as the airport's operators.

Major construction of the terminal at Australia's first major airport in 50 years is now complete, and designers have shared images of the soon-to-be-fitted-out interior. Emphasis has been placed on the passenger experience, connectivity, future-readiness and sustainability. On the latter, the building's suspended cultural ceiling, the largest of its kind in Australia, was constructed with 'LocAi' (ASI-certified low-carbon aluminium), which saved over 3,000 tonnes of embodied CO_2.

Natural materials, such as sandstone from Australia's Central Coast, have been incorporated into the interior and the wooden ceiling slats are said to filter light, mimicking sunlight shining through eucalyptus. The terminal's sprawling horizontal form is inspired by nearby Cumberland Plain.

Sustainability efforts include the use of a 700-kilolitre rainwater tank to supply recycled water to mechanical equipment, landscape irrigation and other amenities. The terminal roof and covered walkways have 8,848 solar panels to annually save around 4,052 metric tonnes of CO_2. (Photo Bechtel)

Terminal construction tender launched for **CPK Airport**

WITH FINAL designs for the new Centralny Port Komunikacyjny (CPK) Airport in Poland complete, Polish authorities have issued a $1.3bn tender to select the general contractor to build the passenger terminal. The contract is expected to be signed in 2026, with construction planned to begin the same year and be completed by the end of 2031. The airport is then set to open in 2032.

The tender is open until August 29, and CPK will shortlist up to five bidders for evaluation. CPK chief Filip Czernicki said its requirements for the tender "aim to engage entities capable of delivering the contract at a high standard, as well as navigating not only international construction standards but also Polish legal requirements related to the construction process."

Located between Warsaw and Lodz, the terminal, designed by Foster + Partners and the Buro Happold consortium, is set to handle 34 million passengers per year initially, with the potential to expand to 44 million. The facility will have a floor area of approximately 450,000 m^2, which is over two-and-a-half times larger than Warsaw/Chopin. (Photo Foster + Partners)

Leeds Bradford inaugurates extension

THE NEW £100m terminal extension at Leeds Bradford Airport has finally opened, increasing customer area space by around 40%. Promising "a smoother and more secure journey for all passengers," the extension features a departure lounge with additional seating, three new boarding gates, new shops and restaurants, a new baggage reclaim area to "streamline the arrivals process for travellers," and an upgraded passport control area. There is also a new premium lounge, Six Eight One, for passengers to enjoy.

The current scheme was first announced in 2018 before being replaced by plans for a brand-new terminal to be built at the south end of the runway. This project was canned in 2022 due to delays and the decision to launch a public enquiry into the plans. This "long overdue" extension is the first major upgrade to the terminal since it opened in 1968.

Work on the second phase of the project is scheduled to begin next year, which will involve a full refurbishment of the existing terminal to modernise its infrastructure, along with the construction of a new security hall. By the time the entire project is complete, the airport will have 38% more floorspace, 76% more retail space, 83% more seating, a 77% increase in luggage reclaim belt capacity, and 50% more security lanes. Passenger numbers are expected to increase by 2.5 million. (Photo Leeds Bradford Airport)

Sky View

Insights and opinions on the industry's hottest topics

By Jonathan Hinkles, 30-year UK airline executive

The early morning TAP Air Portugal flight from Stuttgart to Lisbon on July 17, 2019, was shaping up just like many other routine flights across Europe that day. Its crew had arrived at the German city on the previous day and rested before their early start; the aircraft had landed the night before.

Yet, as the crew gathered in the hotel reception to head to the airport, something was amiss: the first officer hadn't joined his crew downstairs. Unable to contact him, the shocking discovery soon dawned on the hotel and his fellow crew members. He'd passed away during the night.

You and I might think this to be an extraordinary set of circumstances, but the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled otherwise when passengers on that flight sought compensation under EU Regulation 261/2004. The ECJ decided TAP's flight cancellation didn't meet the threshold for "extraordinary circumstances", despite a situation that most of us will thankfully never face in our entire aviation careers. The law truly is an ass!

EU Regulation 261/2004 came about after EU Commissioner Loyola de Palacio's flight home from Brussels to Spain was cancelled. I don't know the circumstances which led to that night's cancellation; what I do know is that the knee-jerk reaction led to legislation that has hampered passengers and the industry ever since. It was so badly drafted that multiple ECJ rulings have been needed to clarify what it might really mean.

You'd think passenger rights legislation would be good news. No. Gone are the days when an airline would delay a fog-bound morning flight to await an improvement in the weather. That flight is now cancelled outright – because the airline has "no fault" grounds – to protect later flights in the aircraft's schedule where delays could mean passengers become entitled to compensation.

In airlines with the luxury of larger fleets, a four-hour delay will see aircraft being swapped to create two delays of half the length. It means double the number of passengers being delayed, but none entitled to compensation. It's bad for the environment, too. I well remember an effort to load four extra tons of fuel on a late-running transatlantic flight to enable it to run at full speed and arrive before the threshold for compensation. Over £250,000 was at stake on that flight alone, but do you really want an aviation system run on this basis? It's only thanks to the professionalism of our pilots, engineers, cabin crew and ground staff that these nutcase rules haven't manifested themselves in a serious incident, or worse.

For all of the homilies from consumer organisations like *Which?*, EU261 has been bad news for passengers. More passengers have experienced cancellations and delays than before, a boon for a legion of no-win, no-fee lawyers springing up to take on passenger claims. The UK's justice system is creaking with claims, with Manchester courts at the epicentre. Is this really justice when it now takes longer than ever before to prosecute serious criminal cases?

Thankfully, the EU has finally recognised the shortcomings of these rules and has committed to change; the threshold for delay compensation is to be increased. Birdstrikes, sandstorms, volcanic ash and the untimely passing of a first officer in a Stuttgart hotel will now properly be considered to be extraordinary circumstances. Compensation will no longer be payable.

In big handfuls, it's a victory for common sense and for aviation safety.

As with all things, there's a sting in the tail. In practical terms, EU legislation was baked into UK national law when we left and even if the EU decides to change its laws, the UK retains the original version of that very same EU law unless it takes separate action to amend it. As far as the UK is concerned, our air passengers are stuck with the original version of this flawed legislation until such time as our government can get around to updating it.

Aviation is an international business, flying 700,000 passengers over the UK border every day. Unless the UK government acts to replicate the EU's changes to Regulation 261/2004, we'll end up with a two-tier system of consumer protection as our rules diverge, chaos which will place yet more pressure on our beleaguered courts.

I don't doubt that you'll hear the voices of no-win, no-fee lawyers and consumer organisations arguing against any change. The resultant mess is the lifeblood on which they thrive. Yet for consumers, an outcome that produces more cancelled and delayed flights is untenable. It's therefore essential for the UK government to act swiftly to adopt these long-overdue changes to a piece of EU regulation that was flawed from the outset, yet we're stuck with as a consequence of Brexit. AW

> "In airlines with the luxury of larger fleets, a four-hour delay will see aircraft being swapped to create two delays of half the length"

Wizz's XLRation

As Wizz Air becomes the first low-cost airline to take delivery of an Airbus A321XLR, **Robert Veitch** travels to Hamburg to witness the handover ceremony

The arrival of the first Airbus A321XLR in the Wizz Air fleet offers an intriguing proposition: that low-cost carriers can finally fly long-haul routes in a way that has never before been possible. One might think this could finally be the spark for budget airlines to look west and transatlantic for expansion. In time they might, but for now the smart money is heading east and southeast to burgeoning markets in the Middle East and Indian sub-continent. In these territories, route and airport capacity is growing and the opportunity to fly is becoming increasingly affordable to an ever-expanding number of people.

The XLR was launched at the 2019 Paris Air Show and the response was enthusiastic, with 14 aircraft ordered during the first week. By the end of 2024, the order book had swelled to 516 aircraft from 25 legacy and low-cost customers around the world.

Airbus claims it burns 30% less fuel per seat than previous generation competitor aircraft and flies at roughly half the trip cost of modern widebodies. But we have been here before in the 1990s, when extended-range twin-engine operations (ETOPS) Boeing 757s operated long, thin transatlantic routes, offering a range of up to 3,900nm.

Across its various iterations, the A321 has retained the same basic dimensions: 146ft from nose to tail, an 117ft 5in wingspan and 38ft 7in in height. The real evolution has been its scope to eat miles. Lufthansa's first example, D-AIRA (c/n 458), which is still in service with the airline, began its flying career in January 1994 and offered a range of 2,300nm.

WIZZ
LRA
1st A

BELOW: ***As well as being the airline's maiden XLR and the first of the type to be UK-based, it is also the first XLR delivered to a low-cost carrier and the first powered by Pratt & Whitney GTF engines*** ALL IMAGES KEY-ROBERT VEITCH

AIRBUS
Wizz
1st.
A321XLR
delivery to Wizz Air

ABOVE: ***Owain Jones (left) and Christoph Zammert in the auditorium for the handover ceremony***

That increased to 3,200nm with the arrival of the A321-200 and 3,500nm with the A321neo. The A321LR expanded the envelope to 4,000nm, and now the XLR has moved the dial to 4,700nm, an increase of 15% on its immediate predecessor.

Not so long ago

William Franke, now 88-years-old, formed Indigo Partners in 2002. As well as Wizz Air, the Phoenix, Arizona-based private equity firm has shares in Mexican budget operator Volaris, Chilean carrier JetSmart and Frontier Airlines. He has been Wizz chairman since 2004 and has held the same position at Frontier since 2014. Indigo once owned around 20% of Wizz but reduced its shareholding after Brexit, currently standing at around 9%. Franke placed the original order of 27 XLRs at the Dubai Airshow of November 2021, as part of a mammoth 255 jet order to be split among his airlines. In time, 27 became 47, each with an all-economy, 239-seat configuration, five seats shy of Airbus' stated maximum capacity of 244. It has been referred to as the Swiss Army knife of aircraft, with its game-changing capabilities creating the opportunity to fly long, thin routes that were too far for existing narrowbodies and uneconomic for widebodies.

With the delivery of G-XLRA (c/n 11631) imminent, Wizz announced it would be based at London/Gatwick and operate to Jeddah/King Abdulaziz International in Saudi Arabia – a route that shows the flexibility of the aircraft, but barely scratches the surface of its possibilities. The second aircraft, also to be based at Gatwick, will be G-XLRB (c/n 12437) which is due for delivery in time to commence the Medina/Prince Mohammad bin Abdulaziz service from August 1. The third, 9H-XLA (c/n 12346), will go to Wizz Air Malta, with its base and launch route still to be confirmed. József Váradi, Wizz Air CEO, has previously said the intention is to locate the XLR fleet at six to eight bases, with three to five aircraft at each.

The first A321XLR to enter revenue service was Iberia's EC-OIL (c/n 11504) on November 6, 2024, with a flight from Madrid/Barajas to Paris/Charles de Gaulle, before operating its first long-haul route on November 14, from Madrid to Boston/Logan. Since then, the Spanish carrier has accepted two more aircraft and Aer Lingus has welcomed three. As well as Wizz, Iberia and Aer Lingus, other XLRs scheduled for delivery this year will go to American Airlines, JetBlue, Qantas, Air Canada and Azores Airlines.

Development

Fanfang Zhao, single-aisle product marketing analyst at Airbus, told *Airliner World* that a decade ago the A321 was operating in regional continental clusters around the world. But with the progression of the type, those clusters are connecting intercontinentally as the XLR offers a seamless introduction into existing A321 fleets.

Its 12,900 litre rear centre tank has increased the airframe's weight by four tonnes, creating a maximum take-off tonnage of 101. That has led to landing gear reinforcement, slightly thicker tyre rubber and the addition of brake fans, »

> "This is the start of a new era for Wizz. We can go further into that big wide world than we've ever been before"

XLR
wizzair.com
wizzair.com
A321XLR

LEFT: ***Factory-fresh landing gear with not a speck of dirt in sight***

RIGHT: ***The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) issued the type certificate for the Airbus A321XLR powered by Pratt & Whitney GTF engines in February 2025***

> “In the afternoon sun, Romeo Alpha shimmered; perfect paintwork, fresh tyres and not a sign of dirt on the landing gear”

which also help reduce turnaround times. The wings have also been improved with a flap redesign and there are other minor tweaks throughout the aircraft. Airbus offers optional additional centretanks, giving the aircraft the potential to fly for up to 11 hours, but the Wizz jets do not have these as they are not necessary for its current operations and capacity requirements. The compatibility and commonality of the aircraft with its A321 siblings is obvious and, for Wizz pilots, the conversion training involves e-learning.

Onboard, the Airspace cabin features heating pads along the length of the cabin floor, plus a trio of temperature controls to ensure a consistent ambient climate throughout. The overhead bins remain the same size, but have undergone a slight redesign. The manufacturer says the innovative mood lighting better reflects the human body clock during different phases of longer-duration flights including boarding, dining, relaxing, sleeping and waking. For flight, the cabin is pressurised to 6,000ft, allowing passengers to arrive at their destination feeling fresher.

On the downside, the Wizz cabin configuration includes a standard 28in seat pitch. Having flown with the airline on four-hour sectors in the past, this wasn’t a problem for me, but others, particularly those taller than six foot, might think otherwise on the new, longer routes. In true low-cost style, all the food and drink is buy-on-board. Recently, the airline has been trialling in-flight, in-seat app-based ordering on four routes.

Handover

G-XLRA was due to enter service on March 31, operating the airline’s inaugural Gatwick-Jeddah service. That date slipped due to an unforeseen

LEFT: ***The airline expects to receive its first tranche of eight XLRs by mid-2026***

RIGHT: ***The all-economy Airspace cabin is configured with 239 seats in a 3-3 layout with a 28in pitch***

POS #101
VEST

ABOVE: ***Alun Evans, fleet technical captain at Wizz Air, flew the acceptance flight for the airline***

delay in the delivery process. Instead, A321neo, G-WUNA (c/n 11591) made the maiden flight in 5hrs 42mins, with a reduced load factor to avoid a refuelling stop. A second delivery that was scheduled for April 10 slipped past, which meant *Airliner World* and the other invited guests finally arrived at the Airbus facility at Hamburg/Finkenwerder on May 20. It was worth the wait and false starts.

Once through the main gate at Finkenwerder this physically impressive facility has more the feel of a small town and less of a manufacturing and assembly hub. Inside the hushed auditorium at the heart of the complex, the delivery ceremony began with a video presentation of the aircraft, after which Christoph Zammert, Airbus EVP of the A320 Family programme, declared "Finally" and announced that Wizz was "joining a small but growing fleet of XLRs. It's impressive to see the development of this airline over the last 20 years, which will include its 300th aircraft this year."

Owain Jones, Wizz Air's chief corporate officer, continued: "The arrival of our first A321XLR is a defining moment for [us] and our passengers. This aircraft is one of the great results of our two decades-long successful co-operation with Airbus, that brings a revolution to air travel, enabling us to offer non-stop intercontinental routes at unbeatable prices, while maintaining our commitment to efficiency and sustainability."

As well as being the airline's maiden XLR and the first of the type to be UK-based, it is also the first XLR delivered to a low-cost carrier and the first powered by Pratt & Whitney GTF engines. With the airline having celebrated its birthday the previous day, Jones was in a buoyant mood: "We've had 21 years of pushing boundaries – it's what Wizz does. More than 800 routes and 470 million passengers [in that time]. This is the start of a new era for Wizz. We can go further into that big wide world than we've ever been before, and we're very happy with what we've taken delivery of."

He confirmed the airline is most likely to use the type on seven- to eight-hour routes: "Until today, we could not fly from one corner of our rectangle to the other [and] it's no secret we are looking at India." The aircraft gives the airline enough range for what it wants to do, while achieving "better economics with 239 passengers [because], for us, business [class] is a waste of space." The delivery programme runs to 2030, with the first eight units to be delivered by mid-2026.

Keren Rambow, VP of Airbus relations for Pratt & Whitney, added: "We want to celebrate this milestone. We truly appreciate the partnership [with Wizz] over 21 years as we celebrate our 100th anniversary. We're very happy and looking forward to forward to keeping the partnership going."

Meeting G-XLRA

Over at Delivery Centre B, there was the opportunity to tour the aircraft. In the afternoon sun, Romeo Alpha shimmered: perfect paintwork, box-fresh tyres and not a sign of dirt on the landing gear. One wonders where it might travel and how far it might fly during the next two decades or so. From the outside, the only visible clue to distinguish the XLR, aside from a large 'XLR' fuselage sticker, is the marginally longer belly fairing that now extends to beneath the L4 and R4 doors.

For the flight crew, it was a joyous day. Alun Evans, fleet technical captain at Wizz Air, had flown the acceptance flight and was all smiles in the cockpit. Outside on the ramp, Phil Cullen, head of airline operations at Wizz Air UK, who would later fly the aircraft to Luton, called the ferry flight "a career highlight."

As the event came to an end, *Airliner World* departed Finkenwerder through an exit close to a landside viewing platform, where a cluster of enthusiasts were soaking up the sun as they waited to snap that all-important departure photograph. Later that afternoon, G-XLRA touched down at London/Luton after a 1hr 38min flight, before repositioning to Gatwick on May 22. It entered revenue service the following day, then after six return flights – three each to Athens and Prague – it flew its first Jeddah service on May 28 as W95605, taking 5hrs 44mins on one of the new, longer routes for which it was originally purchased.

Wizz
XLR
21st

BELOW: ***The delivery of G-XLRA (c/n 11631) coincided with the airline's 21st birthday***

Walsh's wake-up call

The recent IATA AGM revealed a sector balancing record revenues with fragile margins, growing environmental pressures, and a need for urgent reform, as **Thomas Haynes** reports

ABOVE: ***Willie Walsh has been the director general of IATA since April 2021*** IATA

Willie Walsh, director general of the International Air Transport Association (IATA), delivered a wide-ranging address on the state of the industry at the 81st Annual General Meeting in Delhi. He opened with a familiar refrain: while the aviation industry's headline figures look impressive, margins remain wafer-thin at the passenger level.

"In 2025 airlines will make a $36bn profit on revenues of $979bn," he said. "While those are big numbers, let's remember this equates to a net margin of a mere 3.7% or $7.20 net profit per passenger."

The former Aer Lingus, British Airways and IAG chief executive – who has been the director general of IATA since April 2021 – said the industry's profitability "is not commensurate to the enormous value that we create at the heart of a value chain supporting 3.9% of global GDP and providing and supporting jobs for 86.5 million people."

In a media roundtable at June's AGM, Walsh told *Airliner World* that there are many airlines that do manage to make a decent return, but also a significant number that don't. "The way we look at it is, what's the cost of capital for the industry and what's the return they're making," he explained. "It's been rare for the industry to exceed its cost of capital, and for any [sector] to be sustainable, you have to be able to return your cost of capital."

He said this reflects the highly competitive nature of the industry and low barriers to entry: "We clearly have more work to do to make the industry sustainable from a financial point of view."

Illustrating his point, he said over the last decade 408 airlines have been started around the world, while during the same period, 420 have failed – leaving a net minus 12. "This tells you how competitive and difficult this industry is," he said.

SAF, SAF and SAF

Sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) and the lack of progress on expanding its use dominated the agenda – and Walsh's speech – at this year's AGM. The

WELCOME
स्वागत
IATA
TO THE 81st IATA AGM

ABOVE: ***The 81st IATA AGM was hosted by low-cost carrier IndiGo in Delhi, India, between June 1-3*** KEY-THOMAS HAYNES

director general issued a stark warning over the state of global aviation's decarbonisation efforts, accusing governments and industry partners of failing to match their climate ambitions with meaningful action.

In 2021, IATA members agreed to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. By 2022, ICAO member states agreed to net zero by 2050 and confirmed CORSIA (ICAO's Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation) as the sole global market-based-measure in support of aviation's decarbonisation.

While initial support was vocal, tangible progress has stalled. One of the key frustrations lies in the slow development of SAF. Although IATA's roadmap estimates the alternative fuel type could deliver 65% of the necessary emissions reductions by 2050, current production is drastically behind target – expected to reach just two million tonnes in 2025, equating to only 0.7% of global airline fuel needs.

"What's gone wrong?" Walsh asked. "Despite their enthusiasm, governments did not create supportive policy frameworks to meet their 2030 interim target." In particular, he cited uncertainty around US tax credits, investment pullbacks from major energy firms such as BP and Shell, and a growing trend of aviation-specific taxes across Europe and beyond. "Government support for CORSIA is weakening with many governments seeking to milk aviation for more taxes," he added, calling out countries such as the UK, France, Germany, and the Netherlands.

A mandate from the EU to mix 2% SAF in jet fuel supply – designed in part to drive down the costs of SAF – has actually had the opposite effect and instead raised prices, according to Walsh. "It's an outrage that suppliers are charging airlines compliance fees that value SAF at double its market premium over conventional jet fuel," he said. "That's a billion-dollar windfall for fuel suppliers. This is the EU great green scam."

"This is not where we should be in 2025. We have a quarter century to get to net zero. There is no time for delay and no tolerance for government greenwashing and unnecessary cost increases."

IATA urged governments to focus on three areas to make SAF a success. Firstly, they would like to see a redistribution of a portion of fossil fuel subsidies to renewable energy producers, contributing to "eliminating the disadvantage" they face when compared to "big oil". Secondly, taking a holistic approach to energy policy that supports SAF. This means boosting renewable energy production, ensuring SAF receives a fair share, and enabling shared infrastructure, co-production,

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RIGHT: ***Walsh told* Airliner World *that there was "more work to do to make the industry sustainable from a financial point of view"*** KEY-THOMAS HAYNES

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BELOW: ***Host airline IndiGo took the opportunity to order 30 more A350-900s, signing a memorandum of understanding with Airbus to increase its existing order for the next-generation widebody*** IATA

> “Flying is freedom. And the human spirit thirsts for the exhilaration that freedom brings”

ABOVE: ***In a huge coup for IATA, Indian prime minister Narendra Modi visited the AGM and gave a keynote speech*** IATA

and broader benefits for the energy transition across all sectors. Finally, IATA called on governments to ensure the success of CORSIA as the only carbon trading scheme. IATA said Guyana is the only state to have made their carbon credits available for all airlines to purchase and claim against their CORSIA obligations.

Restrictive regulation

Regulation is a fact of life for airlines, but Walsh argued that much of it is poorly designed and unfairly burdens carriers. The director general said bad regulation is “far too prevalent” because politicians and regulators “are not playing with their own money” when coming up with policies. Passenger rights legislation was a particular target for criticism, with EU261 coming under specific scrutiny when Walsh said there has been no reduction in delays or cancellations over the regulation’s 20-year history. “It boggles the mind that governments in the US, Canada and elsewhere are putting EU261 style approaches into their own passenger rights regulation,” he said.

Walsh highlighted the common complaint from airlines that sees them being the ‘insurer of last resort’ when it comes to paying for passenger care and assistance even in events caused by problems not of their own making.

Capacity conundrum

Meanwhile, IATA sees two dimensions to the capacity problems facing airlines: availability of aircraft and of infrastructure. On the first, Walsh said the manufacturing sector is “failing badly” and that this hits revenues as some demand will go unmet. Scarcity of aircraft also pushes up maintenance and leasing costs.

The trade body estimates a 14-year average wait-time between ordering and delivery of aircraft. The number of handovers scheduled for 2025 is 26% less than what was promised a year ago, according to IATA.

“It’s just not acceptable that manufacturers estimate it could take until the end of the decade to sort this mess out,” he said.

Keeping aerospace outside of trade wars will help avoid the situation getting worse, but the “real solutions must come from manufacturers”, Walsh added. “The only thing I can say is that solutions cannot come fast enough.”

On infrastructure, Walsh reported “positive developments” in this area, particularly in the AGM’s host country, India, which is opening secondary airports in Delhi and Mumbai to cope with demand. Elsewhere, Vietnam aims to have an airport within 100km (62 miles) of 97% of its population, while Morocco is doubling airport capacity by 2030.

Other positive developments come from cities such as Dubai, Singapore, Bogota, Buenos Aires, Lima, Mexico City and more, which have all got expansion plans in place. “The US is pursuing a major air traffic management modernisation and, in the UK, Heathrow is buying a backup phone with a loud ringtone, for their CEO,” he joked, a reference to the recent shutdown of the London hub and the CEO’s response. Speaking of Heathrow, he said its “seemingly unconstrained ability to collect more charges with no improvement in performance keeps it firmly on our watch list.”

Despite all the examples of success around the world regarding infrastructure, Walsh said: “As always, Europe is the exception.” The Netherlands came under fire in relation to the Dutch government’s decision to limit movements at Amsterdam/Schiphol over noise concerns. Walsh said politicians are “wilfully undermining competitiveness by destroying capacity under the guise of reducing noise… We must continue to resist this short-sighted madness, lest it inspire copycats.”

Reflecting on the industry’s transformation over eight decades, Walsh closed on a more philosophical note: “We turned flying from a luxury for a privileged few into a safe global mass transit network serving nearly five billion travellers a year. And billions more deserve the prosperity that aviation brings – with the places it makes possible to experience, the jobs it sustains, the trade it supports, the people it brings together and the dreams it fulfils.”

BELOW: ***Since the last AGM, 31 airlines have joined IATA, including Indonesian carrier Lion Air*** IATA

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LEVEL playing field

Spanish low-cost long-haul airline LEVEL saw good growth in 2024. Now with its own air operator certificate, it is preparing for more. **Richard Schuurman** spoke to CEO Rafael Jiménez Hoyos to find out what's on the horizon

With a fleet of seven Airbus A330s that carried 846,000 passengers in 2024, LEVEL is a minnow within the huge pond that is International Consolidated Airlines Group (IAG). Its Spanish sisters Iberia (92 aircraft, 25.8 million passengers) and Vueling (142 aircraft, 38.2 million passengers) are much larger fish, as are British Airways (296 aircraft, 46.2 million passengers) and Aer Lingus (58 aircraft, 11 million passengers). LEVEL is so small that IAG says in its annual reports that it "does not exceed the quantitative thresholds to be reportable, and management has concluded that there are currently no other reasons why LEVEL should be separately disclosed". It begs the question: why does LEVEL exist?

Concept

To understand the concept, you have to go back to 2017. In February of that year, the IAG Board of Directors approved the proposal to launch a low-cost, long-haul brand in response to increased competition in the market. On June 1, it launched services out of the Catalonian city with two Iberia-operated Airbus A330-200s in its own white-green-blue livery to San Francisco (Oakland), Los Angeles, Punta Cana and Buenos Aires.

In IAG's 2017 annual report, then-CEO Willie Walsh said of LEVEL: "We knew the business model worked – that combination of having a low-cost base and targeting an under-served market with a great customer proposition is a winning formula. The success we've recorded so far really has demonstrated that the timing was right, the initiative was right and that the brand is great. It's given us great confidence to expand LEVEL and you are going to see more of that in 2018." The key was the low costs and offering a price-sensitive leisure proposition in partnership with IAG members.

The 2018 report added: "LEVEL is not a traditional, vertically integrated airline business. Instead, the LEVEL model separates the production and operational aspects from the commercial and customer-facing elements of the business. As a result, LEVEL is agile and able to rapidly take advantage of new opportunities."

During 2018, LEVEL added two A330s to the fleet, basing them at Paris/Orly, from where OpenSkies (an IAG-owned French airline operated between 2008 and 2020) flew them to Pointe-à-Pitre, Fort-de-France, New York/Newark and Montréal under the brand LEVEL France. Boston was added from Barcelona thanks to a third A330 there. LEVEL also launched a short-haul branch – dubbed LEVEL Europe – which was based in Vienna and officially run by Anisec Luftfahrt, the remains of a failed plan by Vueling to take over Austrian carrier Niki. Four Airbus A321ceos flew to London, Paris, Barcelona, Ibiza and Dubrovnik. That year, LEVEL carried 888,000 passengers to 25 destinations on nine aircraft.

In 2019, the long-haul fleet grew by another two A330s to seven examples. One extra aircraft in Barcelona allowed for new services to Santiago de Chile and New York and another in Paris enabled services to begin to Las Vegas. The long-haul operations carried 849,000 passengers, but short-haul LEVEL Europe reported 1.028 million passengers as it grew the fleet to six with two A320ceos. The airline opened a base at Amsterdam/Schiphol in April, using Vueling slots.

At the launch of the base, then-CEO of LEVEL, Vincent Hodder, explained to the author a bit more about the concept: "Where IAG had a white spot [untapped area of opportunity] was around the long-haul, value-seeking, modern-minded consumer. The brands [of IAG] really didn't meet this,

BELOW: ***LEVEL started operations on June 1, 2017 as an airline brand with low-cost long-haul flights operated by Iberia***
AIRBUS/A DOUMENJOU/MASTER FILMS

Sister carrier Iberia also operates a significant amount of flights to the Americas, but focuses on connections from Madrid rather than LEVEL's home turf of Barcelona VINCENZO PACE

ABOVE: ***LEVEL Europe was an Austrian airline owned by Vueling that operated between July 2018 and June 2020 using a fleet of Airbus A320/21ceos*** AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/ALEX PEAKE

LEFT: ***LEVEL is part of IAG, which also owns carriers such as British Airways, Aer Lingus and Iberia*** AIRBUS/H GOUSSE/MASTER FILMS

so LEVEL was specifically created to target that group. What we are doing at LEVEL is in the creation of the future, taking elements that have been proven with other airlines in other parts of the world and putting those together in a new configuration which has never existed before. Our business model gives us the flexibility that traditional airlines just don't have."

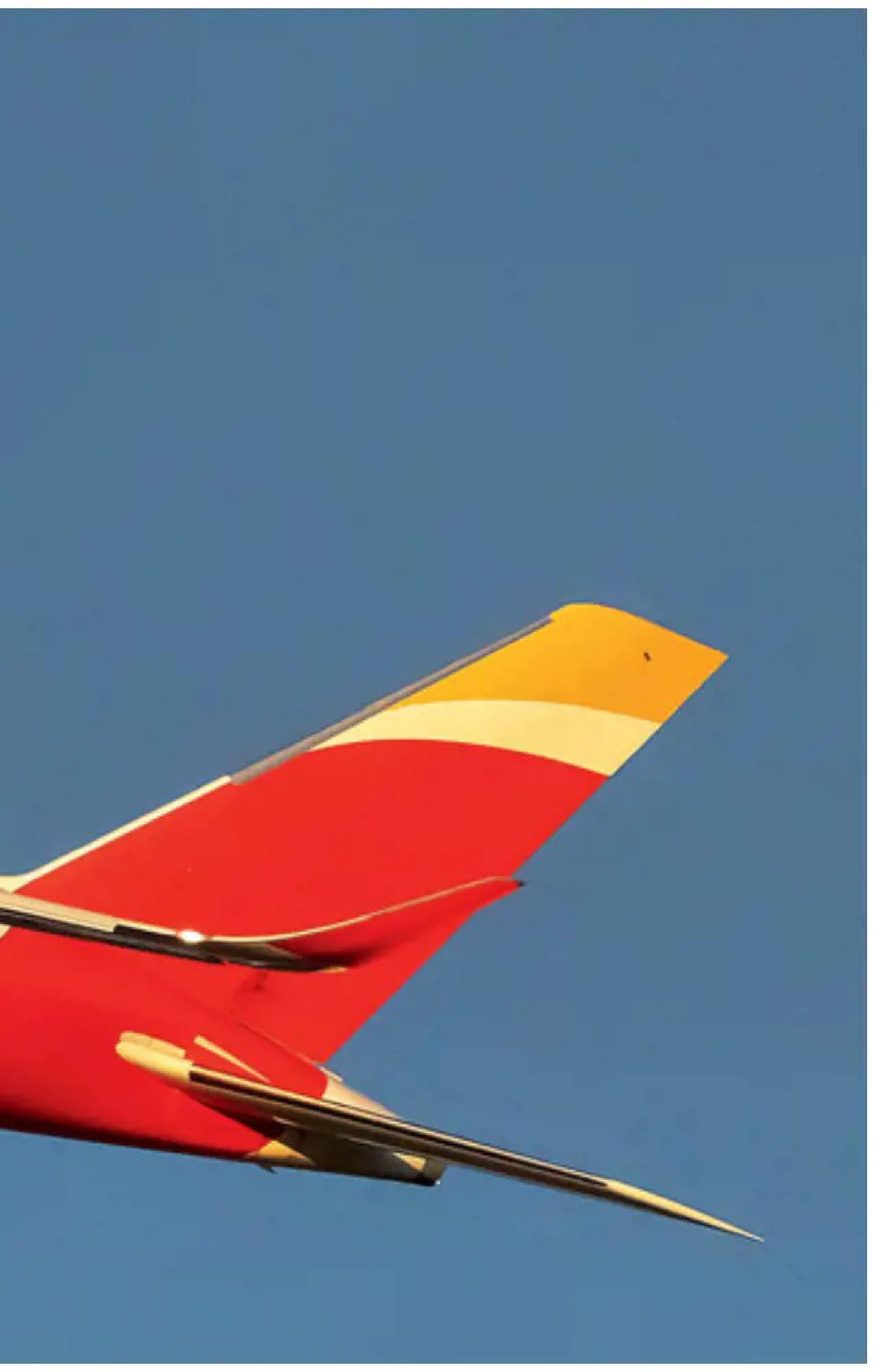
COVID

The year 2020 was supposed to be one of stabilisation, but the COVID-19 pandemic brought havoc. The fleet was grounded in March and only flew limited services later in the year. First, LEVEL operated cargo-only flights, but from September went back to New York and Buenos Aires and from December to Santiago de Chile.

However, LEVEL Europe, which had planned to operate to seven destinations during the summer, filed for insolvency in June and ceased trading. LEVEL France/OpenSkies followed in July after extremely low load factors to the US. OpenSkies was wound down in November, although it still exists today on paper as a 100% subsidiary, just like the unused and dormant entity Fly LEVEL UK registered in Harmondsworth.

When the world further re-opened in the summer of 2021, LEVEL immediately re-launched services to New York, San Francisco, Punta Cana and Cancun. While the highest of the year, capacity in Q3 stood at just 15.5% of 2019 levels, with load factors to the US at 34.7%.

LEVEL celebrated its fifth anniversary in June 2022, but it was more like a re-birth. The network was back to eight routes to North and South America, including Boston, San Francisco and Santiago de Chile. Fernando Candela,



RIGHT: ***Rafael Jiménez Hoyos has been the CEO of LEVEL since October 1, 2024. Previously, he held the role of chief operating officer of Iberia from 2013*** IBERIA

BELOW: ***LEVEL has been operating under its own AOC since December instead of flying as a sub-airline of Iberia*** AIRBUS/ H GOUSSE/MASTER FILMS

CEO since September 2019, then said that passenger numbers were up 6.4% year-on-year to some 421,000. The trend continued in 2023, with a 40.5% increase in passengers to around 701,000. By adding a fifth A330 to the fleet, capacity grew by 33.1% or 183,000 seats y-o-y, notably to Boston and New York. The airline also improved its offering with better menus and connectivity.

In Q1 2024, a sixth A330 joined LEVEL, followed by a seventh in Q4. This helped the airline to further grow passengers carried to 846,000, up 20.7% y-o-y. Capacity grew by 17.5% or 145,000 seats, while the load factor reached an impressive 95.2%. In late March, a summer service was launched to Miami while Los Angeles and Boston went daily. Santiago de Chile was also increaded, becoming a year-around service.

LEVEL ended the year with a new CEO: in October, Rafael Jiménez Hoyos joined the carrier after a spell at Iberia as chief operating officer. He took over from Fernando Candela, who retired from the company. It was Candela who started preparations in 2023 for a major step to secure LEVEL's own air operator certificate (AOC), granted in December 2024 under the name Fly LEVEL Barcelona, which was announced in March 2025 as a 50.1% subsidiary of Iberia.

Fly your way

The author asked Rafael Jiménez Hoyos about his strategy for LEVEL – what the airline is about and which customer the Barcelona-based carrier is targeting. He said: "Our model is based on the 'Fly your away' philosophy. We can provide the customer with a personal experience in Premium Economy and, of course,

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ABOVE: ***IAG-owned low-cost airline Vueling is operating as a feeder at Barcelona for LEVEL flights*** VINCENZO PACE

Economy. They can tailor their trip and choose whatever services they want or save as much money by only paying for the seat. And it's not just young people, we target everyone." The low-cost, ancillary purchase-heavy philosophy is key for LEVEL; ticket rates go from 'Light' to 'Premium Extra' across six different fare classes with varying degrees of perks. Targeting everyone doesn't mean LEVEL is fighting with Iberia for the same customers on routes to North and South America, said Jiménez Hoyos: "We not only have a different offering, but we are in Barcelona and Iberia has its long-haul hub in Madrid." He doesn't see any conflict with the growth ambitions of Iberia: "That was a question at the launch of LEVEL, but the market for getting people to Argentina from Madrid and Barcelona is big enough. Since we've existed, demand has grown as we stimulate the market. Iberia increased their frequencies [too]."

IAG has a clear agenda for its Spanish airlines, to build the network and position of Iberia in Madrid and at the same time reinforce LEVEL's position in the Barcelona market: "One of the strategic ideas for the future is to strengthen connectivity at Barcelona in a partnership with Vueling. They operate to more than 75 destinations in Europe [from] Barcelona. This is an opportunity for us to attract not just people from the Barcelona area, but thanks to Vueling also from elsewhere in Europe." It is currently possible to book flights to LEVEL destinations from Vueling served airports via stopover in Barcelona.

Americas

Since its inception, the Americas have been LEVEL's sole and key markets. They are also key to Iberia. It's IAG's strategy that the two airlines boost their operating profit coming out of North and South America to a combined €1.5bn, almost double that of €737m in 2019. That target is within reach, with €1.4bn already realised in the last year.

Again, LEVEL's contribution will be limited compared with that of Iberia, but the success shouldn't be overlooked: "We have been operating to Santiago de Chile and Argentina

BELOW: ***LEVEL has been based at Barcelona/El Prat – the same location as Vueling – since its inception*** AENA

LEVEL
F-WWKH
1864

ABOVE: ***The white-green-blue branding has remained unchanged since the carrier began operations in 2017*** AIRBUS/A DOUMENJOU/ MASTER FILMS

BELOW: ***LEVEL currently operates a fleet of seven Airbus A330-200s*** AIRBUS/ H GOUSSE/MASTER FILMS

from the beginning. This is an essential market for us, we bring in quite a number of people from there. The perception people have of us is good, we are continuing to grow." During this year's summer peak (July-September), capacity to Latin America will grow by 24% compared with last year, with the daily year-round flight to Buenos Aires being increased up to 11 flights per week in the upcoming winter season. Santiago has four rotations a week.

"We are contemplating increasing the frequencies further because they are healthy, especially to Argentina. In the not-too-distant future, we also want to grow our number of destinations," he said. This year, capacity should grow by an average of 13% and targeted 15% in Q1.

In March 2025, LEVEL celebrated one year of services to Miami. The Florida city, with its large Spanish community, is served four times a week between June and September, dropping to three flights during the rest of the summer. "Miami is not just a route from Barcelona, it's an exchange of culture, we are transferring knowledge and innovation. There is more attached to it than just bringing over tourists."

San Francisco also has four weekly rotations during the summer peak until late September, while New York

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EC-MYA
LEVEL

ABOVE: ***Now under its own AOC, LEVEL has to negotiate contracts with staff and unions independently*** AIRBUS/A DOUMENJOU/ MASTER FILMS

has gone daily. Frequencies to Los Angeles and Boston will peak in July/August, with the number of seats to the Massachusetts city up by 51% y-o-y in April and on average more than 20% during the summer.

This confirms the importance of the US market to LEVEL. With rising tensions between the two continents since the Trump administration introduced stricter border controls and implemented other measures, some airlines and travel companies have noticed a drop in demand. When the author spoke to Jiménez Hoyos in April, that wasn't evident at LEVEL: "So far, our results in North America show that we continue to grow. We remain confident and committed to North America. We are happy and don't see anything to be worried about."

AOC

As mentioned, LEVEL has been operating under its own AOC since December instead of flying as a sub-airline of Iberia. It has been a complicated process to get all the relevant boxes ticked. But why did the airline want to have its own certificate? "The main reason is that thanks to the AOC, we are now the owner of our own strategic decisions, planning the strategy and network. We are gaining flexibility. There are many things that are good for LEVEL. We are no longer dependent on any other airline within IAG. With seven aircraft, we thought this would be the right moment to do it."

Getting the application approved by the Spanish authorities took six months and there is still work to be done. The CEO said: "This year, our priority is to complete the transition of aircraft from the Iberia AOC to the LEVEL AOC. Since we are a new AOC, we also need to obtain traffic rights from the countries we are serving. Right now, we are in the process of getting this done. As soon as we have them, we are moving the AOC from Iberia to ours. It is very complex because we have to comply with so many rules on safety, compliance, maintenance, crew training, so many things. Once we are over it, it [will be] much better." One element is that LEVEL has to negotiate contracts with staff and unions on its own now: "We are completely independent and don't even have a collective labour agreement in place. At some point in the future, we will have it."

Part of the strategy to being independent is to further invest in innovation, Rafael Jiménez Hoyos said: "We are thinking of becoming the most innovative airline [within IAG]. We want to offer our customers the smoothest proposition for their journey. For that, we need innovation. We have many ideas but are still in the process of designing and deciding."

Eight aircraft

In 2026, LEVEL will add an eighth Airbus A330-200 to the fleet. However, Jiménez Hoyos hopes for more aircraft: "We are looking for opportunities and are working with IAG to continue growing. If we demonstrate that we are profitable, and we are, we will have their support and keep growing."

One thing is certain, LEVEL's focus will be solely on Barcelona: "We are the biggest long-haul airline in Barcelona, our relative market share has been growing there since we started, but Barcelona continues to grow year after year. There are huge opportunities there for growing in the long-haul market. We will see in the future, but I prefer to go step by step."

Interestingly, IAG CEO Luis Gallego said during the 2023 results earnings call in February 2024 that the group was evaluating options to re-launch a short-haul version of LEVEL again. He confirmed this a few weeks later, but added that this idea was very early days and would be actioned only if it would make sense.

Rafael Jiménez Hoyos was coy about the plan: "We are focused on long-haul. We will do whatever

BELOW: ***Despite being low-cost, LEVEL offers IFE to all passengers*** IAG

IAG wants us to do; IAG is the owner, strategic decisions are theirs." However, the LEVEL boss doesn't see an immediate benefit in operating short-haul flights again, as Vueling is doing well to act as a feeder: "We are working perfectly with them right now."

LEVEL's original three A330s that arrived in 2017/2018 were returned to Iberia in 2021/22. The airline now operates seven A330-200s, of which the first joined in July 2019 and the last in October 2024. Their average age is 9.9 years, with the youngest at 5.6 years – EC-NNH (c/n 1936) – and the oldest – EC-ODA (c/n 814) – at 18.2 years. Back in 2019, Vincent Hodder spoke about plans to evaluate the A330-900 or Boeing 787-9, but Jiménez Hoyos likes his current fleet: "The aircraft are all in good airworthy condition and we are happy with them. We are doing a retrofit process to get all aircraft to 42 Premium Economy seats and 269 Economy seats and will improve the Wi-Fi." Of the seven-strong fleet, four are currently operated directly by LEVEL under its new AOC. The quartet are all in the correct configuration outlined by the CEO. The remaining three are still operated by Iberia and are currently a mishmash of configurations. For instance, EC-ODA has a 24/275 cabin layout, while EC-ODB (c/n 1293) and EC-OHY (c/n 1319) come with a 20/255 arrangement. On May 9, IAG announced that it had ordered 21 A330-900s for Aer Lingus, Iberia and LEVEL for delivery between 2028 and 2033. They will replace leased aircraft but IAG didn't specify numbers.

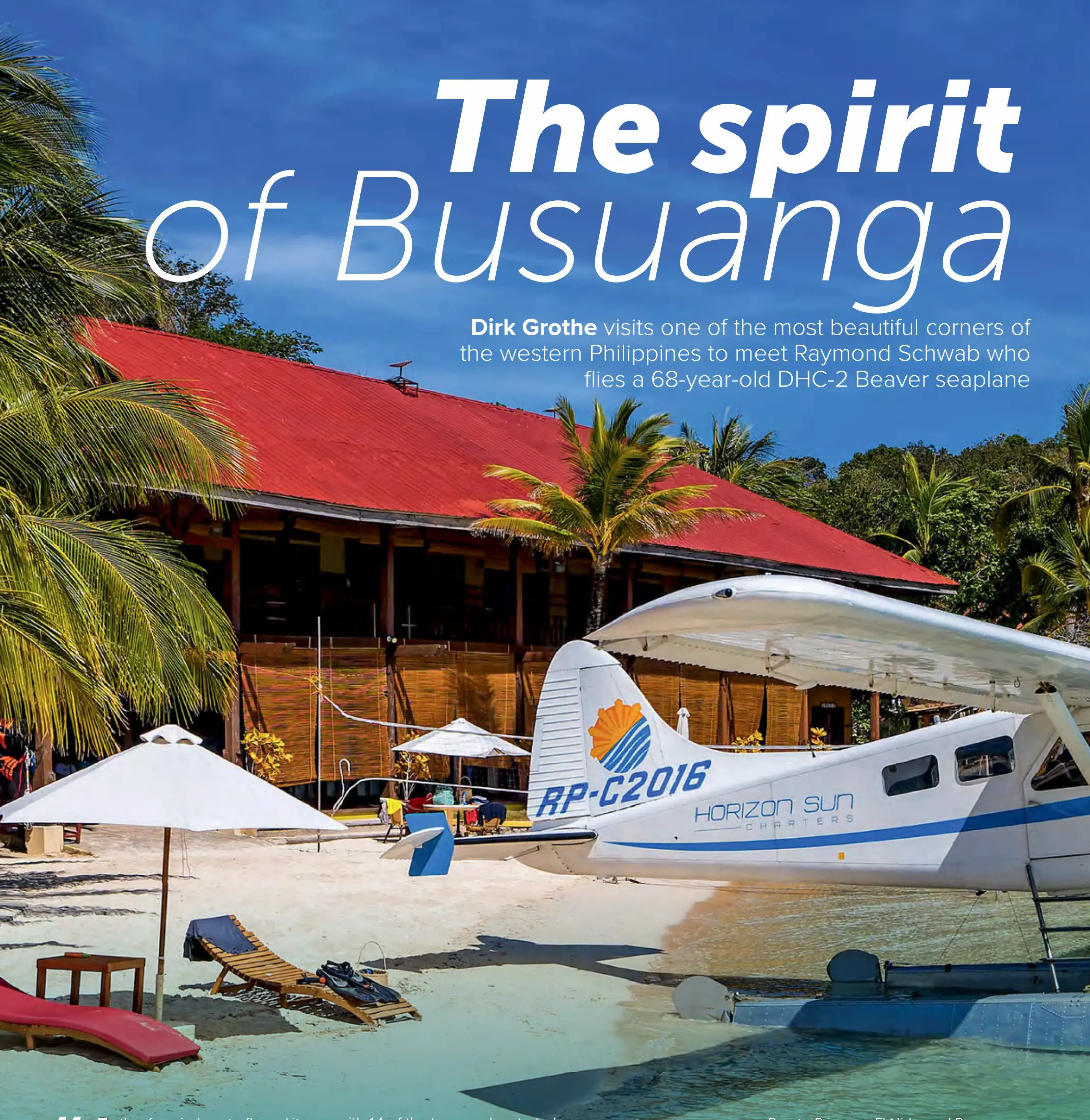
After 11 years at Iberia, Jiménez Hoyos is happy to lead LEVEL. It is a very different company, he said: "People are younger, willing to conquer the world. That's very good because we need the strength and willingness of the people. We have to conquer Barcelona and have to prove we are profitable. It is a challenge, but we have the people to do that." **AW**

ABOVE: ***In 2026, LEVEL will add an eighth Airbus A330-200 to the fleet*** AIRBUS/F LANCELOT/ MASTER FILMS

BELOW: ***On May 9, IAG announced that it had ordered 21 A330-900s for Aer Lingus, Iberia and LEVEL for delivery between 2028 and 2033*** AIRBUS/A DOUMENJOU/ MASTER FILMS

The spirit of Busuanga

Dirk Grothe visits one of the most beautiful corners of the western Philippines to meet Raymond Schwab who flies a 68-year-old DHC-2 Beaver seaplane



ABOVE: ***Raymond Schwab's de Havilland Canada DHC-2 Beaver, RP-C2016 (c/n 1096) in front of its homebase, the El Rio Y Mar Resort***
ALL IMAGES DIRK GROTHE

"It's a fun airplane to fly and it gets me almost everywhere," enthused Harrison Ford as he described his feelings for his 1955 de Havilland Canada DHC-2 Beaver, the prototype of which made its maiden flight on August 16, 1947. By the end of the production run in 1967, a total of 1,692 aircraft had been built and exported to 60 countries.

When thinking of the DHC-2 as a seaplane, it's not uncommon to imagine a coastal scene on Vancouver Island in Canada, where the type has been well utilised. Powered by a 450hp Pratt & Whitney R-985 nine-cylinder radial engine, it has a cruising speed of 143mph. Operators of the robust aircraft include Harbour Air, the largest seaplane airline in North America, with 14 of the type – who started testing the first Beaver with an electric motor in 2019. Outside of Canada, the aircraft can be found operating in pockets around the globe, with the warm waters and sandy beaches of the Philippines being one such place. Located between the South China and Sulu Seas, at the northern tip of the Palawan Islands, Swiss-Canadian Raymond Schwab runs Horizon Sun Charters on Busuanga Island. The area is known for its clear waters and scuba diving among numerous World War Two wrecks, making it one of the most popular among tourists of the more than 7,600 Philippine islands.

Palawan is home to three airports with connections to the metropolises of Manila and Cebu: the island capital Puerto Princesa, El Nido, and Busuanga. Our flight from Mactan–Cebu International Airport, in a Sunlight Air ATR 72-500, to Francisco B Reyes Airport on Busuanga Island took around 90 minutes. The small airport is also served daily by AirSWIFT with ATR 42-600s and 72-600s, Cebu Pacific with ATR 72-600s, and Philippine Airlines with De Havilland Canada Dash 8s. The importance of aviation in relation to regional tourism became clear when the worst typhoon to date, Yolanda, devastated the airport and destroyed the terminal in November 2013. As a result, the number of tourists fell by 75% until reconstruction was completed in October 2014.

After landing on Busuanga Island, the free airport shuttle to the El Rio Y Mar Resort was ready and waiting for me.

Beach life in paradise involves cleaning the aircraft daily to rinse off the salt water

"Spirit of Busuanga"

“The rugged coastline with its beautiful lagoons and resorts, some of which can only be reached by boat, makes Palawan an ideal area for seaplanes”

It took about 20 minutes by van to reach the coast, and then the same again by traditional Philippine bangka pump boat (double outrigger) to the resort. An hour after landing, the author was at the hotel check-in, which is only accessible by boat or seaplane.

Captain Schwab

“The rugged coastline with its beautiful lagoons and resorts, some of which can only be reached by boat, makes Palawan an ideal area for seaplanes,” noted Raymond Schwab in an interview with *Airliner World*. Born in Switzerland and raised in Quebec, he founded Horizon Sun Charters in 2015: “My dream of flying began on a flight from Zurich to Montreal… the visit to the cockpit sealed my future.

“I started flying in 1990 in Quebec at the age of 16. I flew aircraft before driving a car. It took me a few years to finish all my pilot licences – private, commercial, instrument flying, seaplane rating, and airline licence. [All achieved] while working different jobs: airport UNICOM, flying school front desk, dishwasher, factory work, plane washing… and the rest is history.” Schwab first flew seaplanes in Quebec and British Columbia, then again in Madagascar, Indonesia, Switzerland, war-torn Afghanistan and the jungles of Papua New Guinea.

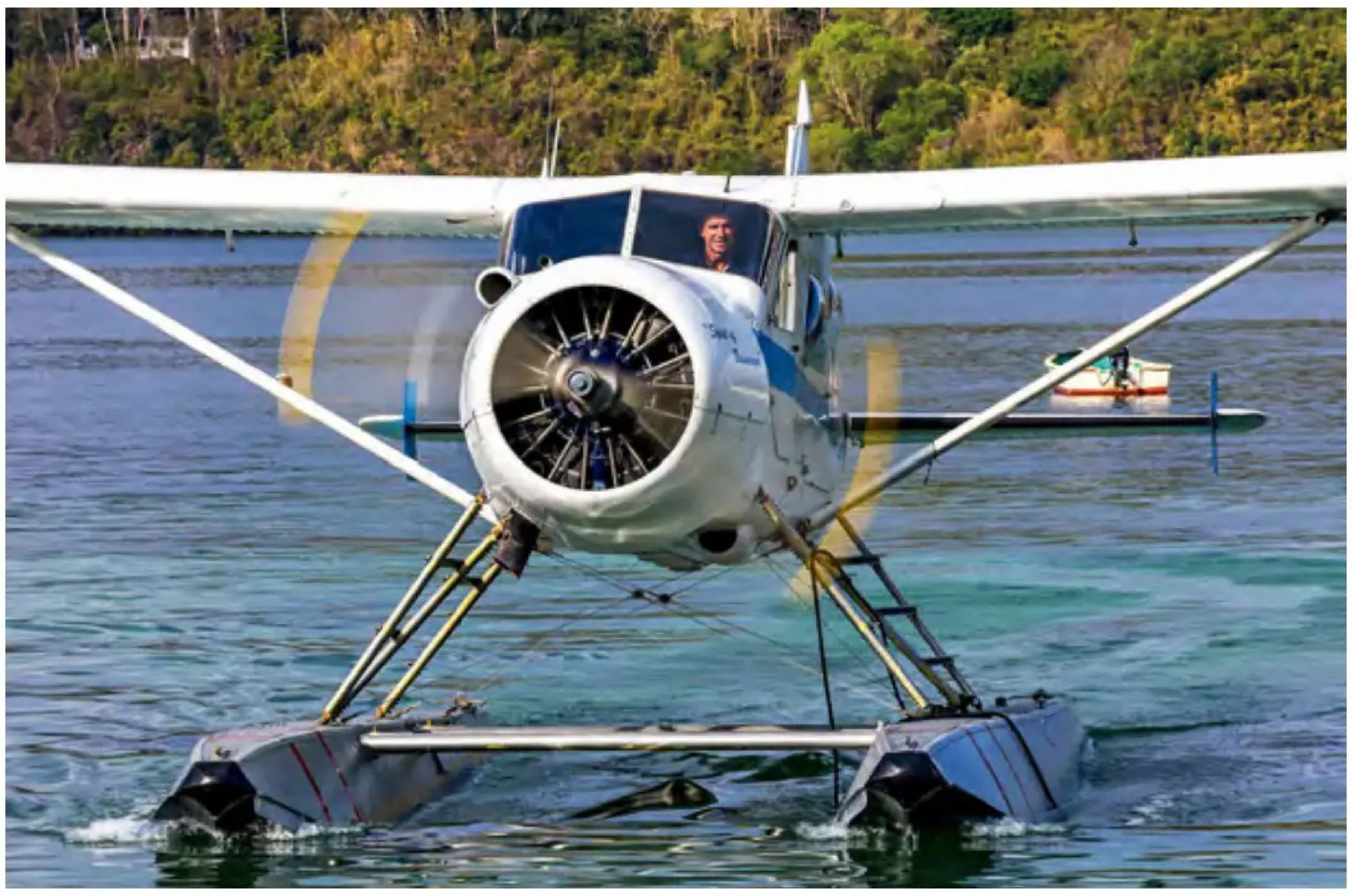
With his lifetime savings, Schwab purchased a 1957 Beaver in Quebec and transported it to the Philippines to start his own business. The aircraft arrived in a shipping container in 2015, delivered to Subic Bay in the north of the country, around 50 miles west of the capital, Manila. First, he had to complete all the necessary documents and procedures to register this Canadian aircraft in the Philippines. He was then given a month to vacate the hangar where the aircraft was stationed, meaning a seaplane base had to be found quickly.

Schwab recalled: “This marked the beginning of my seaplane awareness campaign. I created a PowerPoint presentation and went to anyone who would listen – mainly the local government of every municipality in Palawan.” Eventually, he received permission to park the Beaver on the only lake in Palawan for six months before moving to a permanent location. However, it took a full six years for the air operator certificate

HORIZON SUN
CHARTERS
RP-C2016

LEFT: ***Captain Raymond Schwab started Horizon Sun Charters in 2015***

RIGHT: ***After take-off Schwab made a left turn between two hills and headed south towards Francisco B Reyes Airport***



LEFT: ***The 450hp Pratt & Whitney R-985 nine-cylinder radial engine taxiing for take-off***

“With his lifetime savings, Schwab purchased a 1957 Beaver in Quebec and transported it to the Philippines to start his own business”

(AOC) to be issued – meaning flights could finally begin in 2021.

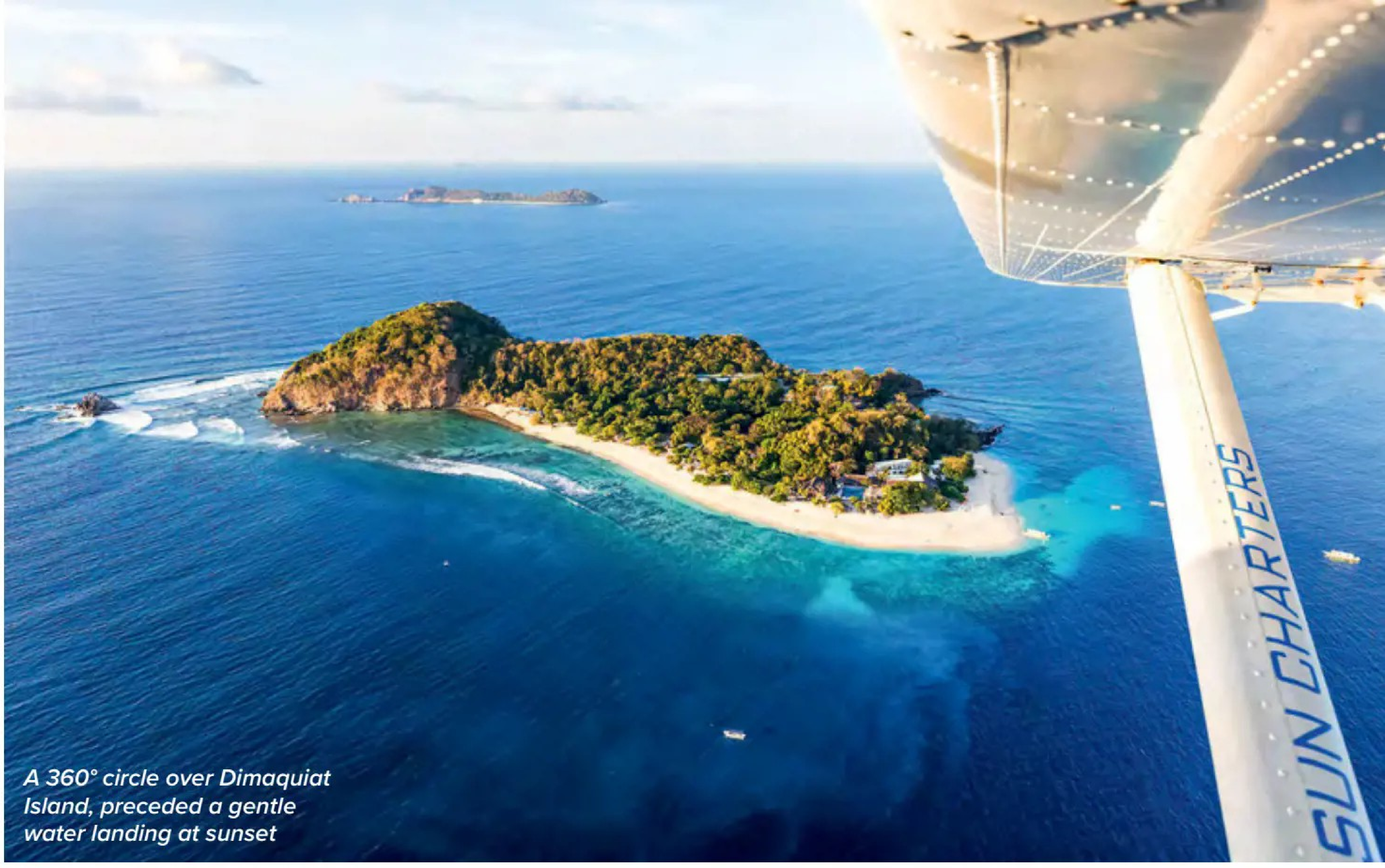
Flying the Beaver

In addition to resort transfers and charter flights, Horizon Sun Charters offer scenic flights for up to six passengers in the 68-year-old aircraft, as Schwab explained: “Resort transfers and scenic flights are certainly the most popular, but transfers between Busuanga Island and El Nido are very popular as well. We also offer packages that include seaplane transfers, hotel stays, and activities like island hopping in remote places such as Balabac.”

The chance to fly in the aircraft proved impossible to resist, and a sunset flight was arranged. Alessio, an Etihad Airbus A350 pilot was spending a few days relaxing with his family at the resort and was easily persuaded to join the flight. The Beaver was fully booked as we ‘floated’ across the lagoon to take-off – my first time in a seaplane. The take-off run was directly towards the resort, which was incredibly exciting as the floats left the water, and the aircraft rose into the air. Schwab made a left turn between two hills and headed south towards the airport, where we witnessed a Sunlight Air ATR 72 taking off, below us. Schwab turned southeast towards the sea and descended to 700ft, circling the beautiful islets and lagoons of Coron Island at 90kts. After flying northwest, then a 360° circle over Dimaquiat Island, we returned at sunset with a gentle water landing. I had expected it to be much rougher than it was, but unlike landing on a runway, I barely noticed the moment of ‘touchdown’ on the water.

The following day offered an opportunity to descend instead of ascend, to scuba dive on the beautiful house reef at the resort’s own Dugong Dive Center. Unfortunately, there wasn’t enough time for the two-hour boat ride to dive down and see the unique and rare dugong, from the sirenia family, and similar to the manatees.

BELOW: ***The departure run on the lagoon in front of the El Rio Y Mar Resort***



A 360° circle over Dimaquiat Island, preceded a gentle water landing at sunset

Spirit of Busuanga

Raymond Schwab's de Havilland Canada DHC-2 Beaver, RP-C2016 (c/n 1096), was originally delivered to the US Army on June 22, 1957, with the registration 56-4399 – one of 973 examples ordered by the US military. In 1972 it was offered for sale at the US Coleman Barracks, located at Sandhofen Air Base on the northern outskirts of Mannheim. It was then operated by various owners in Canada as C-GQKS until 2005 when it underwent a complete airframe overhaul, conversion to a seaplane, and was repainted in a white livery. It remained in Canada until 2015, before ownership changed to Horizon Sun Charters and it entered the Philippine aviation register as RP-C2016.

Q&A with Raymond Schwab

Airliner World: **Why did you choose the Philippines to start a seaplane business?**

Raymond Schwab: I had been living in the Philippines for a decade and felt at home and safe here. Filipinos are some of the most hospitable and friendly people on earth. They are globetrotters and work in all corners of the world, which makes them very open to other cultures.

ALW: **Why did you choose northern Palawan as your base?**

RS: With thousands of islands, beaches, crystal clear waters and an abundance of fauna and flora, the Philippines has so much to offer. The privilege of flying a seaplane over Palawan, the most spectacular islands in the Philippines, is a dream come true. Between El Nido and Busuanga, we fly over the Linapacan Islands, a remote group that offer clear waters and a paradise island experience for those who are up for adventure. It also includes the Calamian Islands, which include Busuanga, Culion and Coron, among others. It is a paradise for divers who head to the wrecks from World War Two, ideal for adventurous diving but also simply magnificent when viewed from above.

ALW: **Was it difficult to obtain the AOC from the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP)?**

RS: Yes, it was very challenging and took many years to finally get our approval to perform commercial flights with my seaplane. It was also during a time when rules and requirements changed from the CAAP and the CAB (Civil Aeronautics Board). We had to overcome a lot, and it is always difficult for a single person with limited financial resources. It takes immense strength not to give up and to keep moving forward.

ALW: **Why did you choose the DHC-2 Beaver?**

RS: The Beaver is reliable and big enough to carry a substantial load. It is easy to maintain and fly, and can land on rougher water than smaller aircraft. It is a privilege to be able to fly this icon here in the Philippines. It also adds a sense of adventure and a unique experience for passengers flying with us.

ALW: **How long can the Beaver remain in service, and where is maintenance carried out?**

RS: It has had, and still has, an incredible life, and doesn't seem to be stopping anytime soon. The Beaver has gone through changes and modifications to keep it flying safely, and even received an electric engine – a sign that it will remain with us well into the future. Horizon Sun Charters does its own maintenance, and we are very proud to do so, as there is no one better to keep the aircraft in top condition.

Pure Hollywood

Schwab is looking to the future with confidence: "We want to add more seaplanes and landplanes, as we also have demand for such services. Seaplanes are great for local flights, but when it comes to longer distances, landplanes offer better value. [They] also have limits on where they can land, as they require a well-protected water surface."

Before then, Hollywood has come calling. A day after our sunset flight, Schwab flew his Beaver to El Nido, where it was due to feature in the 2026 film, *The Last Resort*, starring Daisy Ridley. The production company had hired the Beaver and its captain for a full month – a fantastic opportunity. The film is a romantic comedy adventure, about a hotel manager tasked with scouting a location for a new resort in the Philippines. While searching for potential sites she meets Ben, a charming foreign charter pilot... and the rest is pure Hollywood.

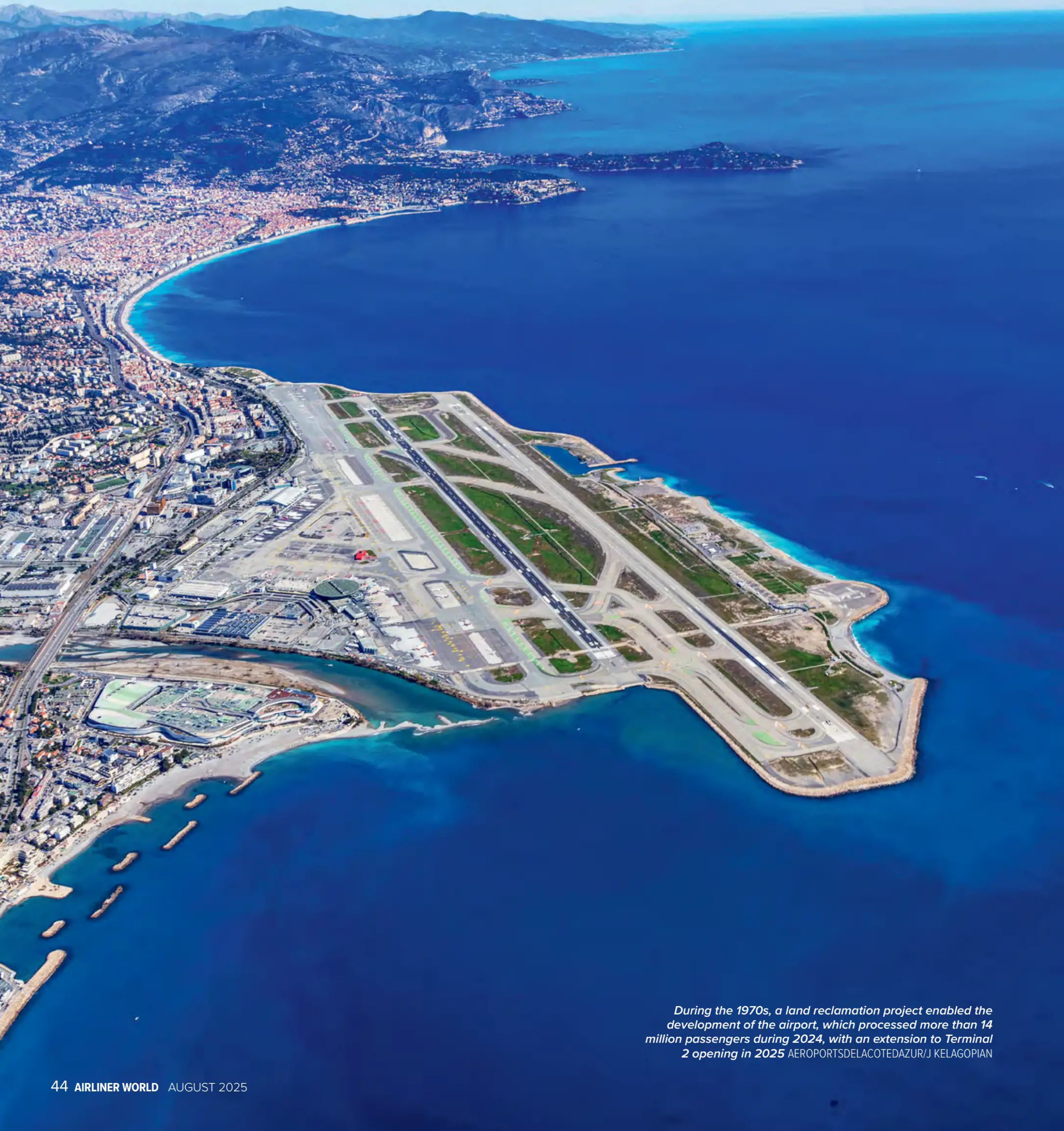
The return flight from Busuanga Island to Mactan–Cebu was made in an 86-seat De Havilland Canada Dash 8-400 belonging to PAL Express and operated on behalf of Philippine Airlines. It was one of 11 in the fleet, all of which are at least 60 years younger than the Beaver. After departure from Francisco B Reyes Airport, there is a last look back at the turquoise lagoons of Busuanga Island and Coron Island before heading southeast across the Sulu Sea towards Cebu. As Schwab put it: "Come to Palawan and fly with us – we will show you places that you will remember for a lifetime."

RIGHT: ***Inside the cockpit of the 68-year-old aircraft***

The author would like to thank Horizon Sun Charters, and Menchie Winkelhausen at El Rio Y Mar Resort, on Busuanga Island, for their kind support with this article

NICE TO SEE YOU,
TO SEE YOU NICE!

Robert Veitch flies to the Côte d'Azur to learn more about the expansion and sustainability plans at Nice Airport from CEO **Franck Goldnadel**



During the 1970s, a land reclamation project enabled the development of the airport, which processed more than 14 million passengers during 2024, with an extension to Terminal 2 opening in 2025 AEROPORTSDELACOTEDAZUR/J KELAGOPIAN

ABOVE: ***Terminal 2 was previously extended in 2002 with the construction of the iconic roundel as the centrepiece***
ALL IMAGES KEY-ROBERT VEITCH UNLESS STATED

Captain Ferdinand Ferber initiated the first Nice airstrip in 1902, when the French aviation pioneer selected a rocky beach east of the Var estuary for a 2,300ft runway on which to test his gliders. A few years later, in April 1910, the site hosted a ten-day airshow, attracting around 100,000 spectators. Further airshows followed as did gradual improvements to the airfield and infrastructure, which was located in the area now occupied by Terminal 2. Postal flights to Corsica began in 1918 and, during the late 1920s, it was known as California Airfield. In the 1930s, the first plans to develop the site for commercial aviation were laid out, including the relocation of a horse racecourse then located where the current car hire building stands and now four miles southwest at Cagnes-sur-Mer.

During World War Two, the airfield was used by Vichy French forces and was bombed by the Allies several times. After the Allies gained control in 1944, the USAF constructed a 4,429ft concrete runway. At the end of hostilities, Air France initiated a Paris-Marseille-Nice route in June 1945. The following year, the airfield was named Nice/Le Var and the route network and number of airlines using the airport began to increase. A runway extension increased the length to 5,577ft and, by 1951, passenger numbers touched 200,000 per year. In 1955, the facility was renamed Nice/Côte d'Azur. A new 7,218ft runway, inland of the existing strip, opened in 1957 and was designated 04/22, with its predecessor tagged 05/23. At the same time, a new terminal opened with a capacity to process one million passengers annually. By 1961, runway 04/22 had been extended to 8,432ft after a 12-acre land reclamation project to the northeast, which facilitated the arrival of the first Boeing 707s.

Passenger numbers reached one million in 1964 and two million in 1972. Terminal extensions and a further runway of more than 9,000ft preceded the arrival of long-haul aircraft and the first direct flight to New York. Further expansion came from a 495-acre land reclamation project that began in 1975 and eventually doubled the ground surface area of the airport. The project was struck by tragedy on October 16, 1979, when a dyke to the south of the extension collapsed as a result of

»

> **"This is why it's a very interesting airport, because you find different planes, helicopters and in one airport; it's something very unique in the world"**

BELOW: ***The facility wants to increase its capacity, especially in terms of quality of service, because it is the primary gateway to the French Riviera***

Embarquement / Boarding
CHECK-IN
CLUB EUROPE
DISCOVER YOUR

LEFT: ***The entrance to the security area at Terminal 1***

RIGHT: ***The original Terminal 2 building opened in 1987. The following year, passenger numbers topped five million for the first time***

> "The facility is committed to being carbon neutral by 2030 without offsetting its own emissions"

an underwater landslide, creating an 11ft tsunami that led to the death of seven people on site. The completed reclamation created what is now the 9,711ft runway 04R/22L, with its parallel runway redesignated as 04L/22R, and 05/23 reconfigured as a taxiway.

In 1987, Terminal 2 was opened and the following year passenger numbers topped five million. The new terminal was extended in 2002 with the construction of its iconic roundel as the centrepiece. By 2011, the airport was handling ten million passengers annually and, during 2018, a tram connection between Terminal 1 and 2 was inaugurated.

Here and now

As the third busiest airport in France in 2024, Nice processed 14,770,626 passengers, a number comparable to its 2019 pre-COVID-19 peak. Currently, it handles up to 52 aircraft movements per hour, offers flights to more than 120 destinations in 45 countries and is used by more than 60 airlines.

The Business Aviation Terminal, located next to Terminal 2, opened in 2010 and contains operations rooms, VIP lounges, crew lounges and offices. From it, business jet users can be transported to the northeastern tip of the airfield, where there are parking stands for more than 75 aircraft. The airport has a rule that forbids business jets to power themselves beyond a clearly defined threshold on the tarmac, with fines of up to €20,000. Aircraft are then towed to their stand by electric vehicles and back to the threshold when departing. Tucked away in the furthest corner is the hangar belonging to Albert II, Prince of Monaco.

Being Franck

To enter the office of Franck Goldnadel, half-a-dozen floors above the ground and over the road from Terminal 1, is to enter an Aladdin's cave of model aircraft and be welcomed warmly by a man whose vocation is quite clearly his vacation. He was keen to explain the rationale behind the new Terminal 2 extension: "We need to increase our capacity to provide a good level of service, especially in terms of quality of service, because we are the main gateway of the French Riviera. This quality of service depends on the space available for our customers, and we are going to increase the capacity of Terminal 2 by an additional four million passengers, so the total capacity of the airport, will increase from 14 million passengers per year to 18 million."

The new build utilises triangular glulam beams in its construction to cut down on the amount of steel in the framework. The new passport control zone and international lounge opened at Easter, then "after the summer period, probably October, we are going to open the pier with the six new gates. The last stage of the opening will be the [36] check-in counters and a new sorting area for baggage delivery." Once complete in early 2026, it will offer simultaneous Schengen and non-Schengen operations.

After that, the immigration hall in Terminal 2 will be revisited: "[It] will be refurbished and reopened. It's another step not included in the [current] extension, but because we are increasing the peak period capacity, we are going to increase the line."

In time, Terminal 1 will be assessed for expansion, but Franck noted that "I don't know if it will be the conclusion we expect – to extend Terminal 1 capacity." As for further land reclamation, that is very unlikely: "We don't need it, two [runways] are enough."

HELI AIR MONACO
3A-MAX

BELOW: ***The helicopter terminal has 14 landing pads, with the most popular route being to Fontvieille in Monaco, which usually takes around seven minutes***

RIGHT: ***Looking down on the Air France and Air Corsica check-in desks at Terminal 2***

BARS & RESTAURANTS

USP Cote d'Azur

Nice is the main gateway for commercial airlines and business jets across the south of France, as Franck explained: "We are not a confused airport, but we are atypical because normally you separate business jets and commercial aviation. In terms of connectivity, we connect the French Riviera with the world. We have daily flights during summer to Atlanta, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, and also flights to Abu Dhabi, Doha and Dubai. So in terms of [the] French ecosystem, we are a bit unique [with] so many long-haul flights from a regional airport."

One reason the facility has this unique appeal is due to its geographical location and the desirability of the region: "Because of the attractiveness of the French Riviera, because we are in an area with a catchment area that is very interesting, because we are also the Monaco airport and because this is far from everywhere in France. If you want to travel by train, you will spend probably six hours to reach Paris. If you want to go to Bordeaux, you need to spend six hours too. So the airplane is the main tool to travel."

In June 2023, the French government banned domestic short-haul flights where the same journey could be made by train in two-and-a-half hours or less. For Nice, that meant no more flights to Marseille – not that there had been any in decades: "This law impacts Bordeaux, Lyon [and Nantes], but not Nice. Are we concerned? No."

Inbound passengers are usually treated to stunning views of the coastline during visual approaches, which is 82% of the time, as aircraft landing on the regular arrival runway, 04L, fly around Cap d'Antibes peninsula, minimising disruption for people on the ground. Instrument landing system (ILS) approaches fly straight over the Cap on short finals for their landings: "We are an airport in the city, but the tracks of the airplanes are mostly over the sea." From the other end of the runway, approaches are always over the sea, with a tight 90° left-hand turn just before touchdown.

RIGHT: ***Looking out from the landside mezzanine level at Terminal 2 can be a mesmerising experience at certain times of the day***

Changing seasons

Although the facility remains busy all year round, there are seasonal variations and Franck said the airport is looking to expand its winter

BELOW: ***Air France operate a mix of Airbus A320 Family aircraft on services to Paris/Charles de Gaulle and Paris/Orly***
VINCENZO PACE

AIRFRANCE
F-HEPC

ABOVE: ***The airport was connected to the Nice tram network in 2018, and journeys between Terminal 1, 2 and Nice Saint-Augustin railway station are free***

LEFT: ***The Terminal 2 extension utilises triangular glulam beams in its construction to cut down on the amount of steel in the framework***

LEFT: ***The new international lounge in Terminal 2 opened at Easter 2025 and has increased capacity beyond passport control***

network: "We're working with all the tourist agencies, from Nice, from the Côte d'Azur department and also from the region, because we have a huge opportunity [for visitors] during the winter. You can see the mountains with the snow, and you can ski one hour from here. In Europe you don't find many countries or many areas where you can ski during the day and go to the beach in the evening. The weather here is normally sunny and we try to convince customers to visit Nice and the area, not just in summer. And we are going to welcome the [Winter] Olympic Games in 2040 and this will be one of the main cites."

The Côte d'Azur hosts several high profile events and this also skews the air traffic during parts of the year: "From April we are in the peak season. It will start with the MIPIM urban festival, and it will increase until the [film] festival in Cannes and Formula 1 race in Monaco. Some airlines have agreements [with] the helicopter airlines, to connect passengers to Cannes or to Monaco."

On the far side of the airfield, abutting the beach, is the helicopter terminal, with 14 landing pads. Helicopters arrive on a hover pad, then taxi while remaining airborne to their allocated landing pad. The most popular route is to Fontvieille in Monaco, which takes seven minutes: "For the F1 Grand Prix, it's better to use the helicopter to go to Monaco, because it is fully closed because of the race and it's easier to land with a helicopter than to drive and go by car. This is why it's a specific and very interesting airport, because you find different planes, helicopters and so on in one airport. It's something very unique in the world."

Sustainable connectivity

Nice Saint-Augustin railway station has been moved 400m up the line to connect better with the airport, as Franck explained: "We are fully aligned with our politicians in terms of transportation because we want to improve the connectivity. I'd rather have [local] passengers connecting through Nice airport, coming by train than a car, even if I'm losing car park revenue. I'd rather be decreasing my CO_2 footprint. This is why we are lucky, because you can get to downtown Nice by walking, bicycles, the tram or car or taxi. The tram is free between the terminals and also to the [next stop at Nice Saint-Augustin] train station and the future high-speed station will move from [Nice-Ville] to this station to improve connectivity further."

The airport is committed to being carbon neutral by 2030 without offsetting its own emissions. Franck said it has reduced its Scope One and Two direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions by 93% since 2013 and became the first airport in France to obtain Airport Carbon Accreditation Level 4+ Transition: "We are also improving to include the Scope Three emissions coming from [airport] stakeholders and airlines, because airlines are working to increase their load factor, to be more profitable in terms of efficiency and so on. So we know the number of flights will increase, but less than the passenger ratio, and because we are sure fleets are going to renew with more efficient aircraft, the CO_2 emissions per movement will decrease."

All airbridges are electric and the airport is the first in France to have electrified all ground operations, with ground handlers using a shared equipment pool: "It's a win-win action, because with all partners, we are doing a lot to decrease CO_2 emissions. For example, you can decrease the amount of ground equipment, so you decrease the CO_2 emissions and the cost."

Beach life

In comparison to his former role as CEO of Aéroports de Paris and CEO of Paris/Charles de Gaulle, Franck stated the Côte d'Azur has much to recommend it: "The view and the sun. When I was at Charles de Gaulle, part of my life was focused on de-icing and snow. That is not the case in Nice."

Since arriving on the Riviera, he has been intrigued by the connection between the airport and its surroundings: "I joined the company during the COVID-19 crisis. The airport is so important for the economy and the development of the [region]. They are fully pushing to help me, to support the development of the airport. But at the same time, they want [us] to be the best in class in terms of environmental commitments."

Building the future

In 2023, Franck said the airport launched World Passenger Day: "It's dedicated to our customers, because we often forget to say thank you to the customers and we are trying to convince other airports to join us." The second iteration in November 2024 saw 15 airports take part, all offering gifts and treats: "It's just a nice thing to do, it's the day we really feel part of the same community."

Our time almost up, it seemed the right moment to ask Franck if the stories were true, that he used to build Lego aircraft and airports as a child: "When I was young, seven years old, my grandfather gave me Lego – it was an airplane – and he told me 'You will work in aviation'. And I never forgot."

And as for the model aircraft that populate his office: "This is part of my heritage of many years as a CEO, especially at Charles de Gaulle. After all, the airlines want to give you their airplane, so that is good." AW

Many thanks to Aymeric Staub and Hélène Navarro for their help with this article

BELOW: *A popular selfie location for tourists is beside the tram stop at Terminal 1*

The Centre Spread

AUGUST 2025

The Lufthansa Airbus A321neo, D-AIEQ (c/n 11267), and its mirror-like reflection create a striking scene as the jet rests on stand at Valencia Airport in March 2025. Configured to carry 215 passengers, the aircraft proudly bears a special '600th Airbus Aircraft' sticker and was delivered to the German flag carrier on April 17, 2023 V1IMAGES.COM/FABRIZIO SPICUGLIA

Airbus A321neo
Münster

Lufthansa
TH
AIRBUS
AIRCRAFT
STAR ALLIANCE
EQ
RYANAIR
EI-EBP

"This may be hopeless"

The crash of Japan Airlines Flight 123 forty years ago remains the world's worst aircraft accident involving a single airliner. **Stephen Skinner** looks back at the events of that tragic day and the subsequent investigation

JAL
JA8119
BOEING 747

Japan Airlines was unusual in using nine Boeing 747SRs (Short Range), capable of carrying 550 passengers and a flight crew of 12 on short-haul domestic flights. In addition to the high-density seating, these 747SRs had strengthened wings and undercarriages owing to the greater number of take-offs and landings (or cycles) required by short-haul flights. Japan Airlines was, at that time, the largest 747 operator in the world, with 38 in service.

One such example, JA8119 (c/n 20783), was delivered in February 1974. Its service life was uneventful until a landing at Osaka/Itami Airport on June 2, 1978. It touched down, lifted off, and then, in an excessively nose-high attitude, touched down again on its tail, striking and scraping the tarmac. All aircraft have tail skids designed to absorb the impact of such events; however, in this instance, JA8119 received severe damage to its underside, resulting in the removal of skin panels and cracking of its rear pressure bulkhead. The 747 was grounded for a month while Boeing engineers supervised repairs, replacing the lower part of the rear fuselage and mending the damaged rear pressure bulkhead. Following a test flight, JA8119 returned to service.

A busy flight

Seven years later, on Monday, August 12, 1985, JA8119 had completed its fourth service of the day and returned to Tokyo/Haneda Airport at 1717hrs local time. The large number of passengers speedily disembarked, and the 747 was readied for its next service as JL123 to Osaka. The three-day traditional religious festival of Bon Odori was starting the next day, and many passengers were travelling on the short one-hour flight to Osaka to be united with their families. As a result, the 747 was booked almost to capacity, with 509 passengers, 12 cabin crew members, two pilots, and a flight engineer on board.

The flight was under the command of Captain Takahama, a senior training captain, who was supervising First Officer Yutaka Sasaki, who was training to become a captain and was occupying the left-hand seat. Despite its tight schedule, at 1804hrs, it was ready for pushback from Gate 18, and eight minutes later, the 747 took off from Runway 15L. By 1824hrs, the jet had reached its cruising altitude of 24,000ft.

The unflyable plane

Just half a minute later, there was a loud boom, and the cabin pressure warning horn began to beep. The 747 had suffered a rapid depressurisation. Immediately, oxygen masks dropped from the cabin ceiling, and a recorded message was broadcast to the passengers. The captain ordered the emergency squawk code 7700 be selected. This immediately highlights the »

BELOW: ***Japan Airlines Boeing 747SR-46, JA8119 (c/n 20783), was delivered to the airline in February 1974. The SR had been developed after a request from Japanese airlines and had modifications to its structure to cope with the greater number of flight cycles***
WERNER FISCHDICK COLLECTION

JAPAN AIR LINES

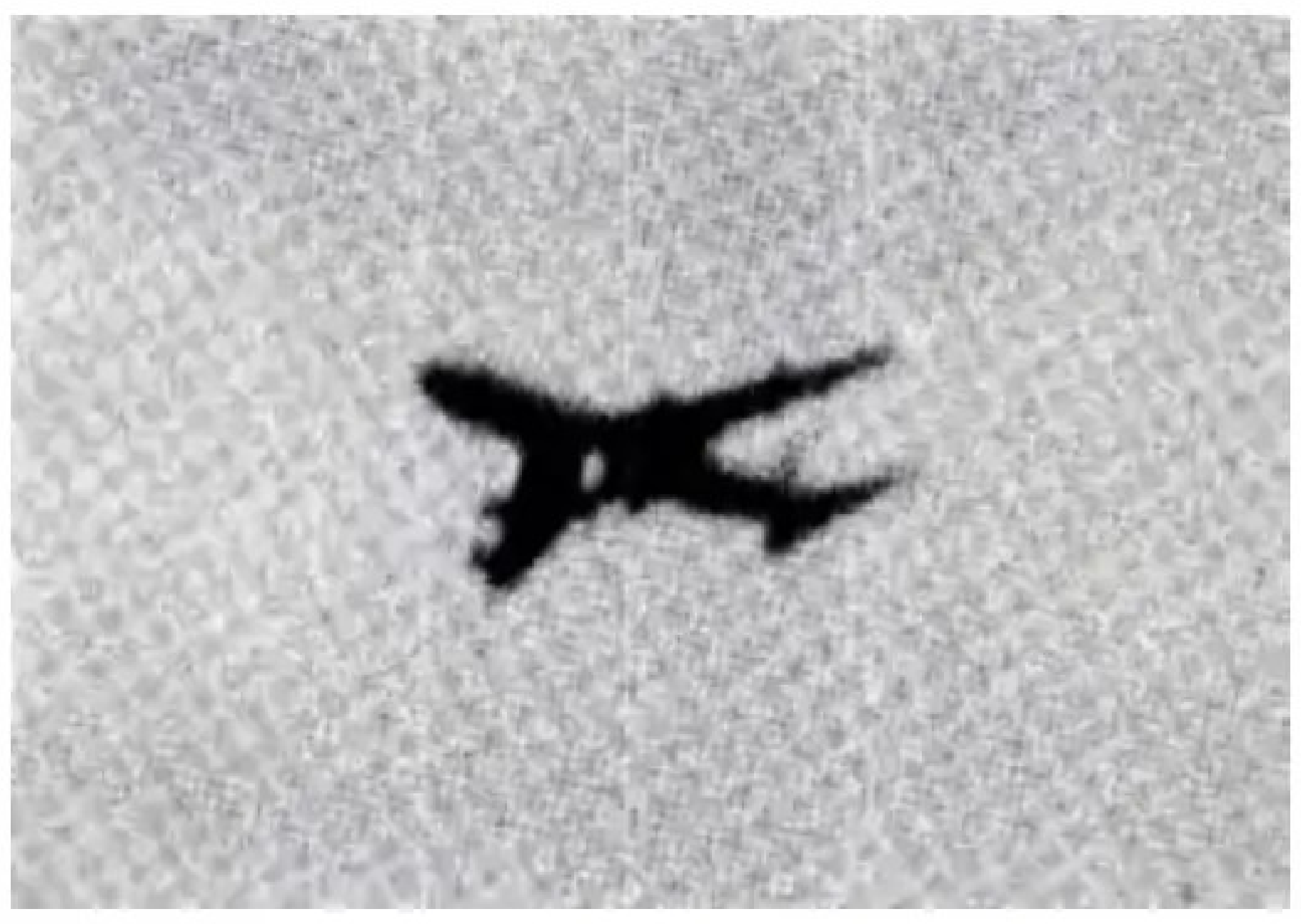
ABOVE: ***Flight 123 took off from Runway 15L at Tokyo/Haneda at 1812hrs, bound for Osaka/Itami*** AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/JEAN

aircraft's "blip" on the air traffic control (ATC) screens, indicating to controllers that the aircraft is experiencing an emergency. Takahama called ATC to declare an emergency and requested permission to return to Haneda.

Tokyo Control instructed JA8119 to make a right turn onto a heading of 090 degrees. Co-pilot Sasaki, who was flying the 747, entered a steep 40° bank. But when Captain Takahama ordered him to reduce the bank, the aircraft did not respond as Flight Engineer Hiroshi Fukuda announced that hydraulic pressure was rapidly falling. Sasaki tried all the flying controls to no effect, as none of these attempted manoeuvres produced a response. The pilots realised the aircraft had become virtually unflyable, having lost all hydraulic pressure needed to move the ailerons, elevators, and rudder.

The pilots radioed to ATC: "But now uncontrol," as the jumbo jet began simultaneously pitching, rolling, and yawing. It started to climb and then descend without pilot input. The flight crew could not understand what had caused the situation until one of the cabin crew reported evidence of some damage, apparently in the rear and to the door 5R window. The flight crew were so busy that it was only now that they donned their oxygen masks, which they should have done immediately to avoid hypoxia setting in.

In the meantime, ATC kept in contact, offering their assistance, while initially unaware of the severity of the 747's situation and the crew's frantic attempts to keep the jet airborne. The pilots repeatedly informed ATC that the Boeing was uncontrollable and wanted to return to Haneda, but they were unable to steer it onto a correct heading.



RIGHT: ***Shortly after the crash, a low-quality photograph emerged of the stricken 747 with most of its vertical stabiliser missing, giving the first indication of the cause of the accident*** JTSB

The four engines were still functioning normally and were the sole means of turning, climbing and descending. But JA8119 continued to sway in all directions on its unguided, uncontrolled flight path. Passing Mount Fuji, the pilots attempted to descend and managed, through differential throttling of the engines, to turn the aircraft in an easterly direction. To help stabilise the crippled 747, they lowered the undercarriage. As there was no hydraulic power, the uplocks were manually released, and the gear dropped into place. With the undercarriage down, the aircraft's drag was increased, and it began to descend.

Then, without any pilot input, the 747 banked steeply, making an orbit before turning north towards mountainous terrain. Over the next eight minutes, the flight crew impotently fought to

BELOW: ***Due to the site's inaccessibility, rescue workers only arrived at the scene 14 hours after the crash*** AFP/GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: ***A Japanese Navy vessel recovers a 5m section of the 747's tail from Sagami Bay*** JTSB

avoid the mountains. Realising how dire their situation had become, Captain Takahama said: "This may be hopeless."

Remaining in contact with ATC, they used full power, but the aircraft's speed decreased. Then, the speed increased, but JA8119 continued to descend. The crew lowered the flaps to increase lift with the painfully slow standby electrical system, which took four minutes. The 747 climbed slightly but then began to descend, continuing to drop below the height of some of the mountain peaks while constantly fluctuating in all axes. It entered a tight turn, and on the flight deck, the GPWS (Ground Proximity Warning System) insistently called: "Pull up! Pull up! Pull up! Pull up!"

Impact and rescue

Then, the airliner impacted Mount Osutaka at an altitude of 4,780ft. ATC continued to call Flight 123 until a military jet reported a huge explosion in the mountains.

Inhabitants in villages below the crash site called the police to report the incident. By the time two Japanese Self-Defence Force helicopters arrived at the scene, darkness had fallen. Fires were still blazing in several places and spilling down the mountainside, but there was nowhere for a helicopter to safely land on the steep, densely forested slopes.

Due to the site's inaccessibility, rescue workers only arrived at the scene 14 hours after the crash. They had set up a base in a nearby village overnight, never expecting any of the 524 on board to have survived. Miraculously, two adults and two Japanese girls seated in the rear of the 747 had survived, giving rescuers new impetus to find others. Regrettably, medical teams discovered others had lived through the impact but later died of shock and exposure in the near-zero temperatures overnight on the mountaintop. Rescuers also found that many of the deceased had realised their lives were in danger and wrote notes saying farewell to loved ones.

Initial investigation

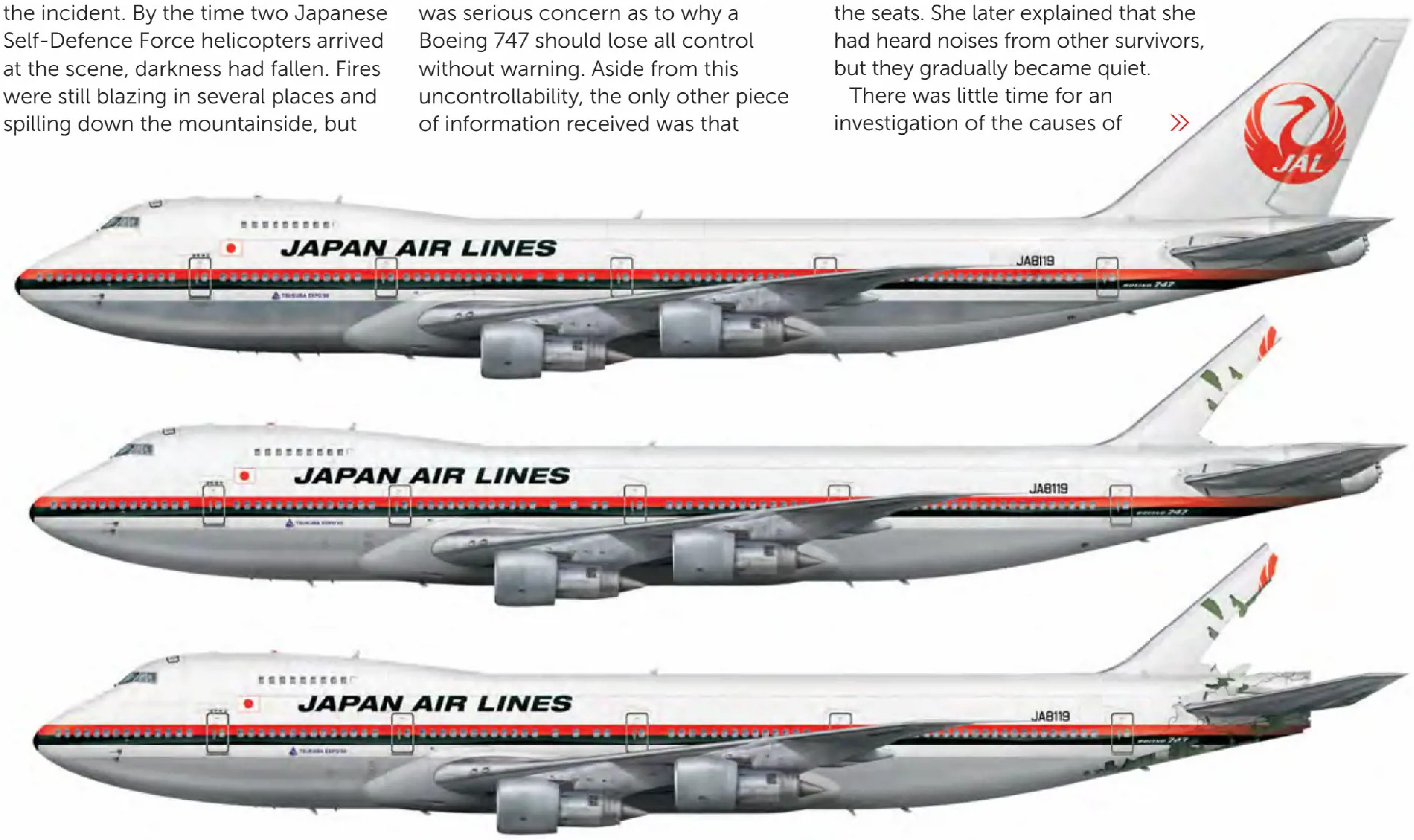
While JAL staff tried to calm the grief-stricken relatives of the passengers, authorities began to investigate the cause of this tragic accident. There was serious concern as to why a Boeing 747 should lose all control without warning. Aside from this uncontrollability, the only other piece of information received was that door 5R was damaged. Had the door broken off, hit the tail and crippled the hydraulics? The answer was quickly revealed when the door was found intact and in place in the wreckage.

Then, a poor-quality photo emerged of JA8119 flying without most of its tail fin and part of the rear cone. This photographic evidence was corroborated when a Japanese Navy vessel discovered a 5m section of the tail in the sea. Scouring the area for more wreckage, numerous pieces were recovered, including a 3m portion of the lower rudder and the APU's large exhaust duct. Could an APU (auxiliary power unit) malfunction have caused the accident?

Investigators had the benefit of Yumi Ochiai, an off-duty JAL cabin crew member, who was one of one of the survivors and seated only four rows from the rear of the Boeing, near a window. She related how there was a loud noise behind and above her as the cabin filled with white mist (condensation), and the temperature dropped markedly. Ceiling panels over the toilets fell, and oxygen masks were deployed. Ochiai assisted the cabin crew in helping passengers put on their oxygen masks and don life jackets. She described the aircraft's motion as resembling 'a falling leaf' and how the engine power was constantly changing. She was surprised to see Mount Fuji through the left-hand window 15 minutes after the incident, as she had expected the 747 to be returning to Haneda. She then retook her seat and fastened her seat belt. She described how many of the passengers were terrified, others outwardly calm, but all knew the aircraft was damaged. After impact, Ochiai was trapped between the seats. She later explained that she had heard noises from other survivors, but they gradually became quiet.

There was little time for an investigation of the causes of »

BOTTOM: ***An artistic representation of Boeing 747SR-46, JA8119 (c/n 20783), fully intact (top), then with its intial damage after the failure of the rear pressure bulkhead (middle) and finally with its full damage prior to impact with the mountain*** ROLANDO UGOLINI



LEFT: ***Before the final impact, the right wing clipped a mountain ridge, and it is believed this is when part of the wing and two engines separated*** STF/GETTY IMAGES

the accident in the first few days as the recovery of the bodies took precedence. Over 1,000 JAL staff helped with the crash, but some had to bear the brunt of criticism and even violent assault.

The readout from the Flight Data and Cockpit Voice recorders made it clear that there was an explosive decompression followed immediately by the loss of all hydraulic power. The ailerons, elevators, rudder and trimmers were unusable. All hydraulic power should not have been lost. Without its fin, the aircraft was inherently unstable.

The Japanese Civil Aviation Board ordered inspections of all 69 Japanese-registered 747s. The British authorities followed suit, insisting all UK 747s with more than 5,000 cycles should have their tail, fin and pressure bulkhead examined. Soon, other countries had their 747s checked. There was concern that whereas most 747s flew fewer cycles on long-distance routes, these JAL 747SRs flew short legs and built up a far higher number of cycles. Though JA8119 had flown 18,830 cycles over 25,025 hours, others had flown many more.

Botched bulkhead repair

Britain's Aircraft Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) had direct experience of the failure of a pressure bulkhead following the crash of a British European Airways (BEA) Vickers Vanguard, G-APEC (c/n 706), over Belgium in October 1971. However, as soon as the Vanguard's pressure bulkhead failed, the aircraft went into a steep dive, crashing less than two minutes later. The failure of Echo Charlie's bulkhead was later found to have been caused by previously undetected corrosion at its base.

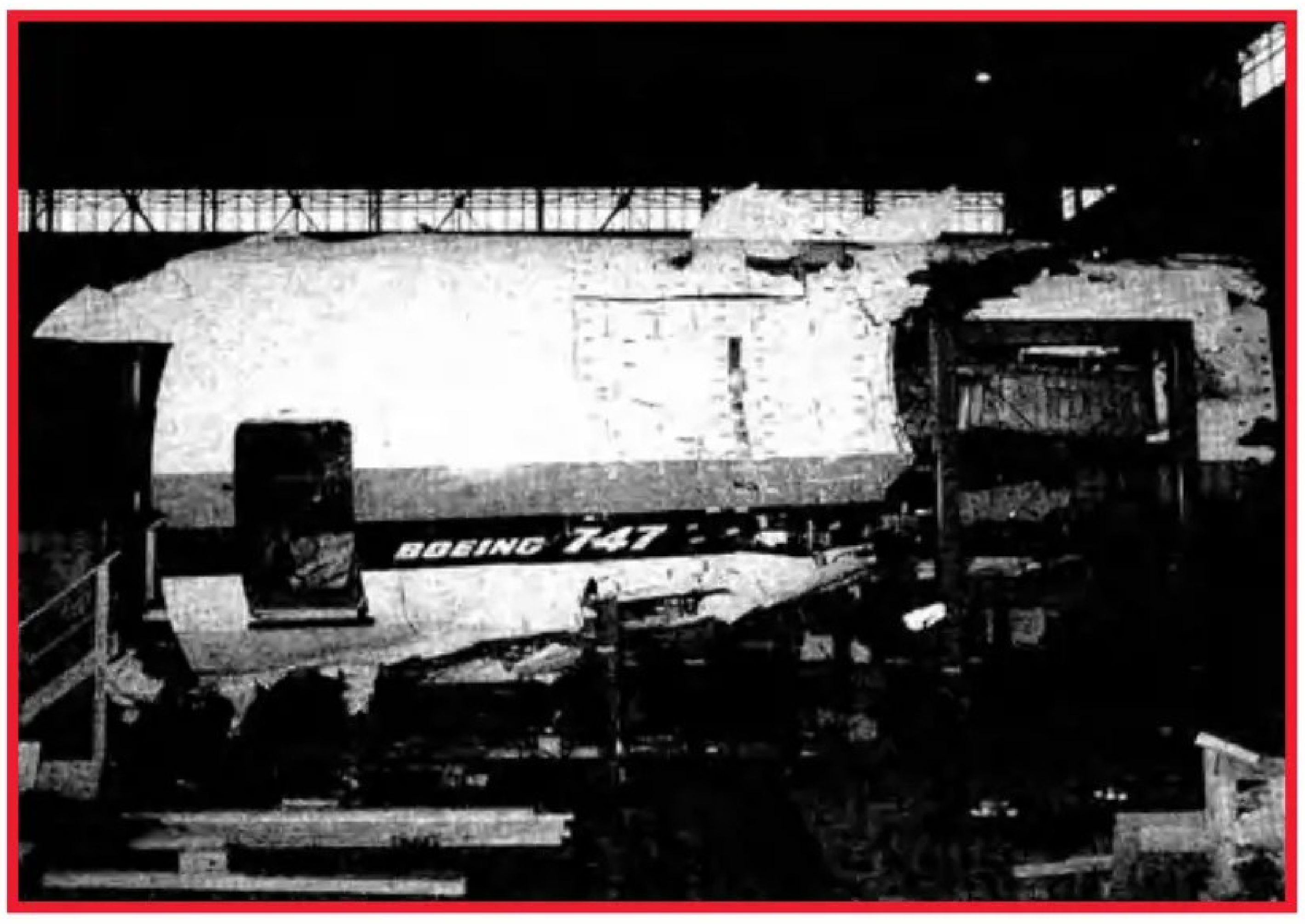
Upon examination of the repair made to the rear pressure bulkhead of JA8119 in June 1978, Boeing engineers discovered that, in joining the parts of the bulkhead together, a large part was only secured with one row of rivets instead of the required two. This reduced its resistance to fatigue to 70%. According to Japan Airlines: "The repair work by Boeing was faulty when they spliced the lower half of the aft pressure bulkhead to the upper half. This resulted in the formation of many small fatigue cracks originating from the joint, which gradually extended over the subsequent seven years. The cracks had spread, connecting each other, and on this flight, when the pressure difference between the cabin and the fuselage aft of the bulkhead increased, the bulkhead finally fractured violently, creating an opening between two to three metres in size."

As the bulkhead ruptured, pressurised air spurted from the breach, bursting the tail fin and disintegrating it. Even worse, the four hydraulic lines, which passed through the bulkhead, were all severed, and within 30 seconds, there was no hydraulic pressure, rendering the flying controls completely useless.

Boeing speedily rectified matters on the 747 by introducing production changes to prevent the escape of pressurised air into the tail and modifications to prevent the total loss of hydraulic power. As an indication of how seriously JAL regards this accident, the damaged rear bulkhead and parts of the fin are on display at its Crew Safety Promotion Centre at Haneda.

Clearly, the loss of an aircraft's fin is critical. In the case of JAL 123, there was no way the flight crew could have saved it from crashing. There have been instances where aircraft have survived, presumably without loss of control over all flying controls. For example, the Convair CV-880 prototype N801TW (c/n 22-00-1) suffered a major structural failure and potential loss during high-speed

BELOW: ***After finding four survivors, rescue workers were given fresh impetus to find others. When none were found, the recovery of bodies took precedence over the investigation*** ROBERT WALLIS/ GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE: ***The recovered wreckage was subsequently reconstructed by the Japanese Transportation Safety Board (JTSB) on the assumption that an irregularity had occurred in the aft airframe during the flight*** JTSB

flutter tests over the Pacific. Flying with one of each of its three elevator and rudder dampers switched off, a violent buffet ensued, and most of the tail fin and all of the rudder separated from the aircraft, leaving it in a critical condition. The crew debated baling out, but the pilots were able to maintain control, so they remained with the aircraft. With the cautious application of asymmetric thrust, an emergency landing was achieved at Edwards Air Force Base, and N801TW was speedily repaired.

Similarly, in January 1964, a Boeing B-52 was conducting tests to assess the effects of turbulence at varying altitudes and airspeeds. Climbing over mountains, a violent gust broke off the fin. This left the plane with only a small stub of metal protruding from the fuselage, serving as the vertical tail. For the next six hours, Boeing engineers and USAF pilots worked together to find out the possible ways for a safe landing. A combination of altering the centre of gravity by moving fuel, changing the engine settings, and small amounts of airbrake gave the crew the fighting chance they needed to make a safe flaps-up landing, and the B-52 was repaired.

Following the crash of JAL123, the airline's president, Yasumoto Takagi, resigned as public confidence in the airline plummeted. Tragically, aside from the 520 lives lost in the disaster, two other lives would also later be lost. Hiroo Tominaga, a JAL maintenance manager and Susumu Tajima, one of three inspectors who certified JA8119 as airworthy following the tailstrike, both died by suicide, blaming themselves for the crash.

China Airlines Flight 611

Almost 17 years after the crash of JA8119, a China Airlines Boeing 747-209B, B-18255 (c/n 21843), disintegrated in mid-air over the Taiwan Strait while operating a flight from Chiang Kai-Shek International Airport, Taiwan to Hong Kong. There were 206 passengers and 19 crew members onboard, all of whom were killed.

During the subsequent investigation, it was discovered that the aircraft had been involved in a tail strike while landing in Hong Kong on February 7, 1980. The jet was then ferried back to Taiwan, where a temporary repair was carried out. A more permanent repair to the aft lower lobe of the fuselage was then conducted between May 23 and 26, 1980.

However, this repair was not carried out in accordance with Boeing's Structural Repair Manual (SRM). Rather than replacing the entire affected skin section, China Airlines' engineers installed a doubler over the top of the damaged area. It was later discovered that this doubler did not adequately cover the damaged area.

Once the aircraft returned to service and after repeated flight cycles, cracks began to appear around the exposed damage. Twenty-two years later, these cracks led to the catastrophic failure of the airframe.

CHINA AIRLINES
AIRHISTORY.NET/PAUL SEYMOUR

日本航空機事故慰霊碑
520人の霊よ安らかなれ

BELOW: ***A memorial bearing the names of those killed in the disaster at Ueno Village in Gunma prefecture, northwest of Tokyo*** JIJI PRESS/STRINGER/GETTY IMAGES

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GOING GLOBAL

Global Airlines has rapidly become one of the most talked about start-ups in modern aviation, thanks to its bold decision to revive the Airbus A380. **Thomas Haynes** joins one of the carrier's first transatlantic flights and speaks in depth with founder **James Asquith** about the story so far

A380-800
GLOBAL

Few aviation dreams are more audacious than starting an airline – let alone one built around the world's largest passenger jet. But for 36-year-old former investment banker James Asquith that bold ambition is now a reality with the launch of Global Airlines.

At 11.33am on May 15, Airbus A380-841, 9H-GLOBL (c/n 120), lifted off into the clear blue skies above Glasgow, Scotland, bound for the Big Apple. This moment had been more three years in the making, and was the realisation of a near 30-year dream for Asquith.

Very few airline start-ups in recent memory have sparked as much curiosity – or controversy – as Global Airlines. Its twists and turns have fuelled no shortage of industry speculation, with much of the attention centred on its all-A380 model and promises of an elevated experience even for economy passengers. But while questions about its business model persist, this article focuses not on what might come next – but on how the airline got to this point, and what it's like to fly on board.

The airline's founder is more qualified than most to judge what makes a good airline from a passenger's perspective. At the age of 25, he became the youngest person ever to visit every country in the world – for which he received an official Guinness World Record. So it's fair to say that he has tried and tested many of the airlines in the world.

RIGHT: ***Founder and CEO James Asquith***
ALL IMAGES KEY-THOMAS HAYNES UNLESS STATED

The journey

But how did Global go from a dream to the reality of an A380 flying passengers across the pond? It's a question the author put to Asquith in an exclusive in-depth interview on the second-ever transatlantic flight to New York on May 21. Seated in the first-class cabin on the lower deck, he detailed the seemingly nightmarish process it has taken just to get one aircraft off the ground and into limited service.

It all began when Asquith stumbled upon an online article about an airline planning to retire its Airbus A380 fleet. "I got a push from the chief pilot, a good friend of mine,

»

BELOW: ***Global Airlines A380-841, 9H-GLOBL (c/n 120), departs Manchester bound for New York on May 21, 2025***
AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/ ENDA BURKE

who knew I wanted to start an airline. He said, 'Now's the best time – during COVID'," Asquith recalled.

Spurred on, he reached out to the airline's board and offered to buy one of their A380s. "And that's how it all started," he said. In the end, Global never actually took delivery of that particular aircraft. Asquith declined to name the airline, but around that time, carriers such as Air France, China Southern Airlines, Hi Fly Malta, Malaysia Airlines, and Thai Airways International all retired their A380 fleets.

A false start

For most, the first time they would have become aware of Global Airlines would have been a picture of Asquith in front of a white A380 posted on Instagram in May 2023. That aircraft, 9H-MIP (c/n 006), was announced as being the first Global A380, but a series of subsequent events meant this ultimately didn't end up happening.

The near 20-year-old superjumbo was the sixth example to roll off the production line and had previously been operated by Singapore Airlines between March 2008 and November 2017, after which it was returned to lessor Doric. It was then placed with Hi Fly Malta on lease and used by the ACMI operator for charter work between July 2018 and December 2020.

When asked what the plan was for 9H-MIP and why Global hasn't yet taken delivery of it more than two years after announcing its acquisition, Asquith responded: "The plan with that is that we've paid two-and-a-half million dollars for it so far and then we uncovered that there was hail damage to it, which was not reported to us at the time of purchase, and then we uncovered that the business class seats were illegal on the aircraft [due to an expired airworthiness directive]. So there was a lot of issues that we found. And so far, we've paid a lot of money and haven't received the aircraft."

Airliner World contacted Doric for comment but received no reply.

Desert dreams

Over the last three years, Global has considered a number of A380s, one of which was a former China Southern example, B-6140 (c/n 120). It had been lined up as the second aircraft to enter service, but following issues with 9H-MIP, it became the airline's flagship. Delivered to the Guangzhou-based airline in February 2013, the quadjet was withdrawn from use in November 2022 and stored at the Mojave Air and Space Port in California the following month.

At the end of 2023, it was announced that the airline had entered into an agreement to purchase the 12-year-old airframe. Asquith wouldn't reveal the exact amount paid, but when asked if it was between $10-15m, he replied that it was "not far off", adding: "You can multiply that by several multiples for your spare parts and heavy

ABOVE: ***Global's A380 parked up at Manchester ahead of its flight to New York***

BELOW: ***Boarding via stairs instead of an airbridge was a novelty for this flight***

ABOVE: *An Emirates A380 fresh in from Dubai taxies to stand at Manchester*

maintenance." Global then partnered with Hi Fly Malta to "accelerate the entry into service" of the jet. This later developed into a deep operational partnership which has seen the wet-lease operator conduct all flying and crewing duties for the aircraft.

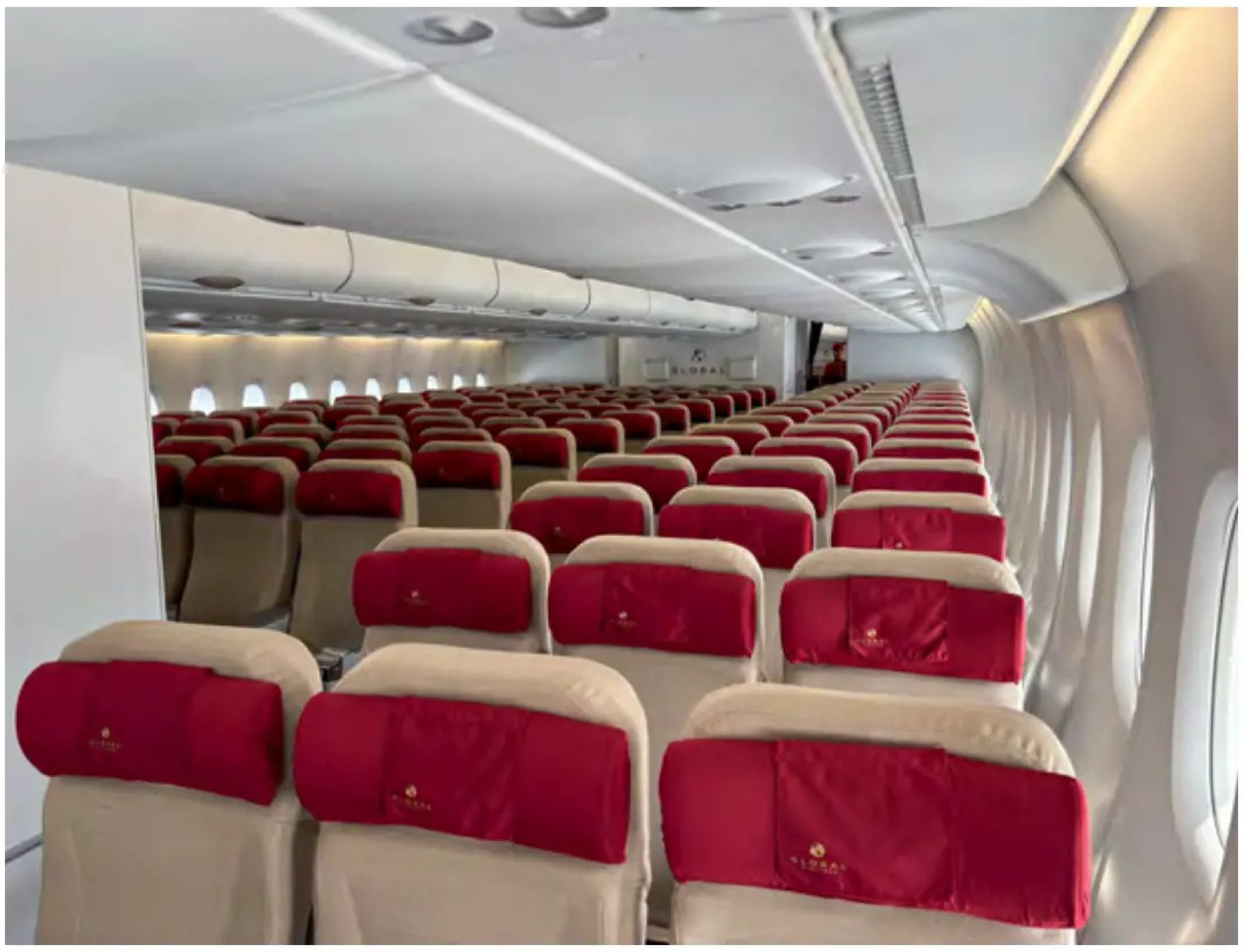
Aviation is difficult, and Asquith would find this out first-hand when trying to reactivate a stored A380. When asked to describe some of the challenges faced by Global, he quipped: "Where do I start?"

"Even leaving Mojave was a huge challenge," he said. "This aircraft was never meant to leave Mojave. There was no tooling, no engineering; so how do you save that plane there?"

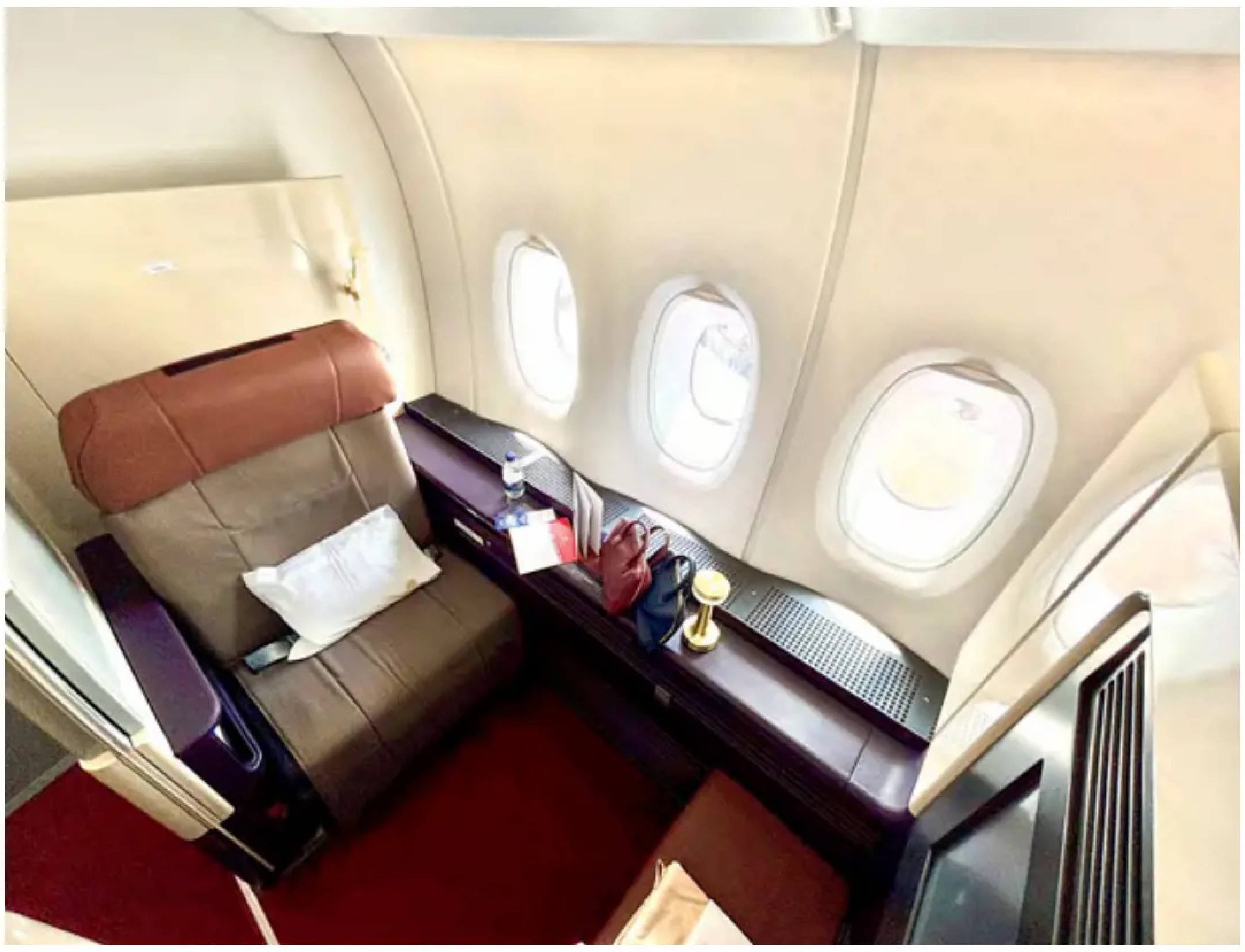
To make matters worse, where the aircraft was parked, because of lamp posts, it had to be positioned with part of the main landing gear on the gravel, rather than the taxiway. "When a plane is parked for a few months, and there's a millimetre difference it causes the proximity gear sensors go out of place," he explained. "The way to fix that is to put the aircraft on jacks." Unfortunately, as Asquith would find out, there are no jacks or hangars capable of handling an A380 at Mojave. As expected, when the aircraft conducted its post storage test flight, the landing gear didn't come up. Without the ability to fix the issue on site, a plan was devised to get the aircraft to heavy maintenance in Europe.

"There were then months of simulator training, figuring out every risk analysis scenario to fly with the landing gear down over the Atlantic Ocean," explained Asquith, as he revealed that the Global team worked closely with Airbus to ensure safety. "It took a long time because we had to be totally safe in the process."

As for why Prestwick was chosen, it turns out that the decision was made six hours before departure because the originally selected airport, which Asquith declined to disclose the identity of, "decided that they didn't have a tug to tow the aircraft that was strong enough, so they cancelled



RIGHT: *One of the economy class cabins on the lower deck of the A380*



RIGHT: *One of eight first-class suites on the lower deck of the A380*

LEFT: ***The 'Sky Pub' is positioned at the top of the main staircase at the front of the A380***

RIGHT: ***My business class seat for the flight to New York – with all the amenities and food from economy class***

us six hours before. Obviously, it was pre-heavy maintenance checks, so everyone's worried about an aircraft becoming a beached whale." The arrival of the super jumbo in Prestwick on May 1, 2024, via a stop in Montreal, marked the first transatlantic crossing for Global Airlines, but also the first time an A380 had ever landed at Prestwick.

Before 9H-GLOBL – as it has now been registered – could enter service, it was required to undergo heavy maintenance. This was to be carried out at EFW in Dresden, Germany between October 2024 and January 2025. However, Asquith revealed that when the jet was moved to Prestwick, "there was no clear path for heavy maintenance, we had to open those paths and it was difficult."

"We were close to agreeing [a deal with EFW]," he admitted. "Honestly, we were even looking at building our own maintenance facility in the airports we were going to, and that was a possibility, but at Mojave, it was not a possibility."

Helping hands

Global has not worked alone on its attempt to get its A380 into service. Asquith said Airbus has been "instrumental" in its efforts, saying he has been in daily contact with the manufacturer: "Airbus has been key… you wouldn't change a toilet seat on this plane without Airbus knowing."

Meanwhile, another key player has been Emirates. The Dubai-based flag carrier is the A380's largest operator and the type's biggest cheerleader. Through Emirates Engineering, Global has received line maintenance support, specifically at New York/

BELOW: ***The view from seat 28A on the upper deck just before pushback***

ABOVE: ***Cruising above the Atlantic Ocean at 40,000ft***

JFK before its eastbound departures. Elsewhere, the airline has received help from the UAE giant in the form of parts sourcing from tyres through to emergency exit slides, which Asquith says are borrowed from an Emirates A380 because of the three-month wait period to have slides overhauled. Emirates even allowed Global to use its lounge at JFK.

"It's good to have friends in that place; they've been incredibly supportive," he said. So key have Emirates been, when asked whether Global could have got to where it is now without the Dubai-based airline's help, after a pause, Asquith replied: "No, these flights would not have happened without them."

Taking off

In March this year, Global finally announced its inaugural flight plans after months of speculation. There were two roundtrips to New York/JFK, first from Glasgow on May 15 and then from Manchester on May 21. A four-day stopover in the Big Apple was required before the return flights, and one-way fares were not available to book.

When asked what the purpose of the flights were, Asquith quickly replied: "Most importantly to stop answering the question, 'when's your first transatlantic flights' – I'm serious, I've been asked that for years!

"It's also important to prove the product, get the feedback on the product, see where we can improve and show it can be done."

The reason for the four-day stopover in New York was to ensure resilience in the schedule so a tech problem wouldn't throw the whole plan into disarray. Asquith said it "had to be like that" explaining that if the aircraft went tech, the operation would have been "screwed" and that allowing that to happen would "bury an airline".

Glasgow and Manchester don't seem the obvious choice of airports to operate an inaugural service from. London/Gatwick has been mooted as the airport from which regular scheduled services are due to launch from. However, because of the arrangement with Hi Fly Malta, technically speaking Global Airlines is a third country operator in the UK which limits its access to the market.

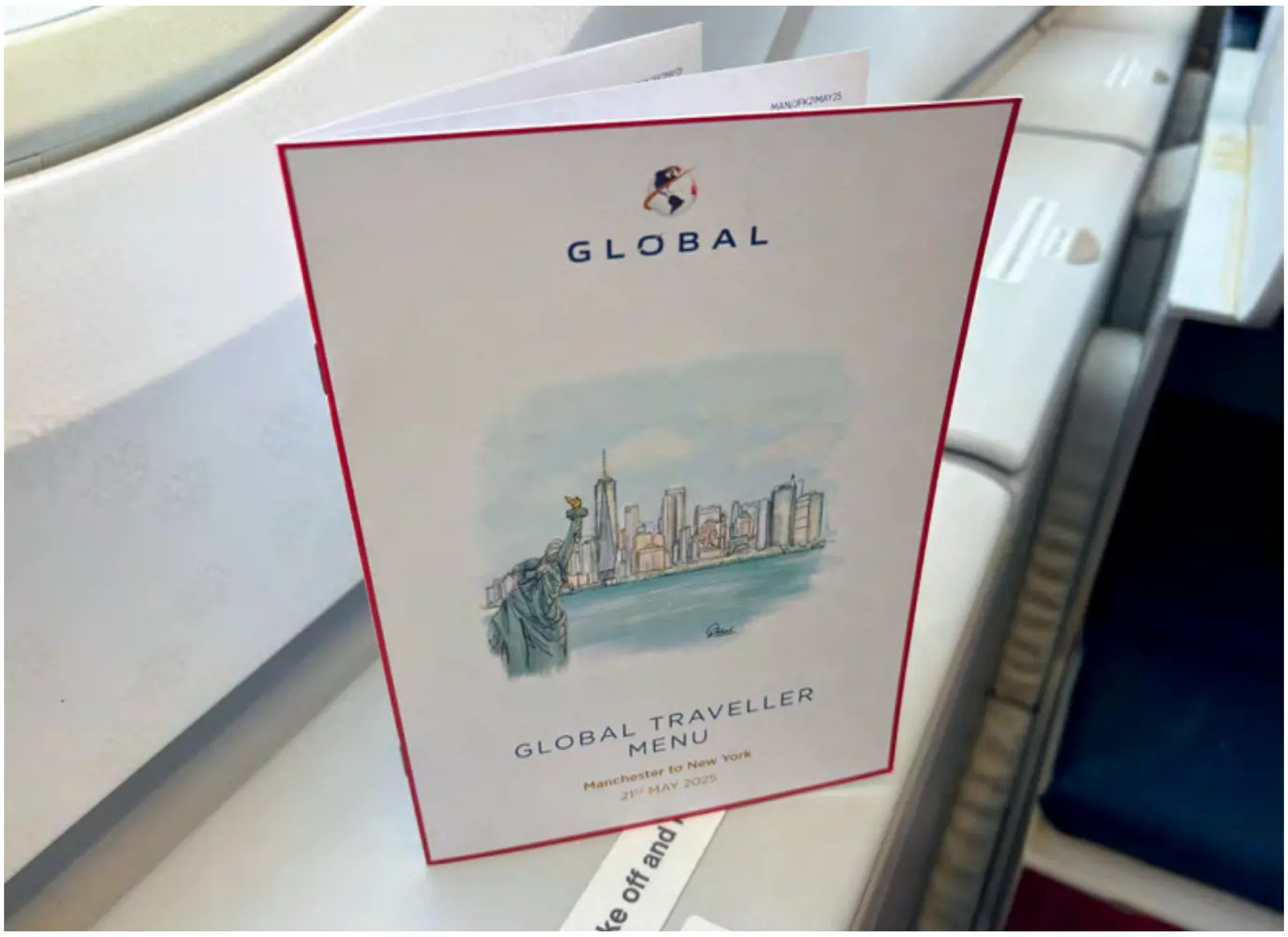
Global's A380 left heavy maintenance in January 2025 and was repositioned to Beja, Portugal, where final preparations were made for its entry into service. At the beginning of May, ahead of its inaugural services, 9H-GLOBL flew a series of proving flights, first to Barcelona, then onwards to Berlin/Brandenburg and London/Gatwick, before returning to Beja.

The aircraft repositioned to Glasgow on May 13, ahead of its May 15

»

BELOW LEFT: ***The lunch offering: a caprese salad followed by pan-fried sea bass with dill scented potato, braised fennel, wilted greens, charred onion and fish velouté, and a citrus tart for dessert***

BELOW RIGHT: ***The afternoon tea was available on request and featured five sandwiches, a fruit scone with clotted cream, jam and butter, a slice of cake and a choice of tea or coffee*** debut. Anticipation was high as many believed Global wouldn't even get this far. As was highly publicised at the time, the inaugural service was beset with issues; mostly focused on a subpar onboard service for some passengers, particularly in the premium cabins. While the flight itself was reported to have been a success, the service was said to have been slow, and some of the food cold when it reached passengers. Speaking of passengers, it is understood there were just 95 on board the airline's inaugural service to New York.



ABOVE: ***Even those in economy were presented with a full menu printed on luxurious card***

Flight experience

Airliner World was booked on the second Global Airlines flight from Manchester, operating as HFM382 and departing from Terminal 1. The airline's presence was hard to miss at check-in, with six desks (40-45) decked out with pop-up banners, a glittery photo wall, and an accompanying balloon tower. Swissport handled the check-in process, which was smooth and efficient. After being offered a Global-branded cupcake, I made my way through security to gate 20D.

It was only at the gate that I began to meet fellow passengers. Many were from the media, though a small but passionate group of enthusiasts had joined the flight simply to be part of this unusual aviation story. Boarding began on time, and I was handed a second boarding pass. Having selected a window seat during booking, I was initially concerned about losing it – but, to my surprise, a glance at the seat map revealed I'd been bumped up to business class.

We were bussed to the aircraft – something that might usually be seen as a nuisance, but in this case added to the novelty, as we'd be boarding the mighty A380 via stairs rather than an airbridge. Once on the ramp, passengers eagerly snapped photos of the aircraft. Ground staff did their best to shepherd us towards the steps, which wobbled as we climbed to the forward door. Boarding was via the iconic main staircase, and many took a moment to pose for photos on the way to the top deck.

I found my seat, 28A, where a menu, amenity kit, pillow, blanket and bottle of water had been thoughtfully arranged. While I had been moved into a business class seat, it's worth noting that the service level remained that of economy. A cabin crew member came around with a clipboard to take lunch orders – a three-course meal with fixed starter and dessert, and a choice of three mains.

BELOW: ***On approach to New York/JFK***

Pushback and engine start began at around 11.45am UTC, roughly 20 minutes behind schedule. As any seasoned A380 flyer will attest, engine start was virtually silent from inside the cabin. We taxied past an Emirates A380, fresh in from Dubai – a surreal sight, seeing another aircraft of the same type while aboard one operated by such an unconventional new player.

Departure was from runway 23L, and at 12.02pm the four Rolls-Royce Trent 970s roared to life – just audible in the cabin as we accelerated down the runway and into the sky.

The seatbelt signs were switched off at 12.25pm, and just ten minutes later the cabin crew began service. By 1pm, they had reached my seat

JFKIAT
323246

ABOVE: ***Deplaning in New York was done via an external ramp system***

at the rear of the cabin. I opted for the pan-fried seabass, and I can say without hesitation that it was the best meal I've ever had in economy – a sentiment echoed by others I spoke with. Unlike the inaugural flight, where food service was delayed and inconsistent, on this occasion it was timely, hot and delicious. A coffee service followed at around 1.50pm.

After lunch, I explored the in-flight entertainment options aboard 9H-GLOBL. While the seatback screens weren't operational, a bring-your-own-device system was in place, accessible via Wi-Fi (which doesn't yet have internet access). I found around 64 films, four TV series, 12 documentaries, four cartoons, and a selection of music and games. Playback was occasionally temperamental, but generally worked eventually. It's fair to say this setup is no match for traditional seatback screens, but it's a start.

In addition to the main meal, an à la carte afternoon tea was also available – complete with all the trimmings. By this point, cabin crew were circulating frequently, and their attentiveness was clear. I pre-ordered the afternoon tea to enjoy later in the flight. Interestingly, there were 24 cabin crew – a notably high number for the 86 passengers understood to be on board. This meant that help was never far away, and service felt impressively personalised.

With time to spare before afternoon tea, I visited the 'Sky Pub' – a small social space at the front of the upper deck. A crew member was manning the bar, and passengers, including CEO Asquith, were mingling. Though compact, the novelty made it a memorable highlight.

Back at my seat, afternoon tea was served. The offering included five different sandwiches, a fruit scone with clotted cream and jam, and a slice of cake – all accompanied by tea or coffee. As a lover of afternoon tea, I was thrilled to see it onboard – and the quality didn't disappoint.

Before long, the seatbelt signs came back on as we began our descent into JFK. Those on the left of the aircraft were treated to views of the Manhattan skyline. After landing on runway 04R, we held briefly to allow departures on 04L before taxiing to stand. Ground staff were filming our arrival – a clear sign this wasn't just another routine movement at JFK.

After 6 hours and 37 minutes, we had arrived in New York.

In summary, this was one of the most enjoyable flights I've ever taken. It wasn't perfect – the IFE system and the seats could be improved – but where Global truly shone was in its 'soft product'. The food was superb, and the crew were exceptional. While the inaugural flight was reportedly plagued by service delays and inconsistent service, this was a different story entirely.

What happens next remains to be seen. Global Airlines still intends to launch scheduled A380 operations and, according to Asquith, plans to eventually secure its own operating licence. He remained tight-lipped on specific timelines.

Perhaps the most encouraging sign was the sheer passion of the people involved. Enthusiasm alone won't keep an airline airborne – but in this industry, it's a vital ingredient for weathering the turbulence ahead.

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BELOW: ***The view from the bus as we drove off towards JFK Terminal 4***

The life and times of virgin australia

As it celebrates its 25th birthday, our man down under, **Chris Frame**, looks back at the airline that still regards itself as a challenger after all these years

Virgin
BOEING 737-800
VH-VUR

The vast size of flight-friendly Australia has for decades led to a reliance on airlines to link cities and regional hubs. Historically, this encouraged successive Australian governments to pursue a two-airline policy. This policy aimed to protect the viability of vital air routes across the nation by restricting competition on domestic trunk routes. The consequence was two dominant airlines – Ansett and Australian Airlines – offering a similar product, on a similar network, with similar aircraft, and at similar prices. However, during the 1990s the government loosened its grip; deregulation was in vogue, and it provided opportunities for new airlines to enter the market. New entrants brought different products, and throughout the decade, the industry started to shift.

In 1993, Qantas merged with Australian Airlines, creating a giant with an impressive international and domestic network. Floated as a public company, the scale of Qantas created big problems for Ansett, which attempted to expand internationally, and woo business travellers. During this period, the globally lucrative low-cost carrier model had failed to take off in Australia. In the 1990s, Compass Airlines tried not once but twice, to establish affordable flights, and both times it collapsed in spectacular fashion.

Other airlines had also attempted to gain a foothold on domestic routes. East-West Airlines tried to build a network bypassing major cities, in the days of regulated services. Impulse, the regional carrier, started carrying passengers on busy commuter routes from June 2000, using Boeing 717s. But even as its first jet took off, work was well underway to establish a brand-new airline. A true low-cost carrier, this new player would not just rival Impulse, it aimed to take on Qantas and Ansett – enter Virgin Blue.

Virgin Blue

Virgin Blue commenced operations in August 2000, with a fleet of half a dozen Boeing 737-400s. The brainchild of Virgin Atlantic and Virgin Express veteran, Brett Godfrey, it set out to succeed where Compass had failed. Key to this was an ability to bring a respected brand and desirable product to the market from day one.

Geoffrey Thomas is one of Australia's most respected aviation journalists and having written for various publications, he reported firsthand on the formation of Virgin Blue and told *Airliner World*: "Essentially, Virgin Blue was Brett Godfrey's idea. He saw the niche in the market. There was a place for a low-cost airline, which [until then] had continually failed to materialise." Importantly, the new airline saw the

»

virgin australia

BELOW: ***As Virgin Blue scaled up, the 737-800 became its primary workhorse, and remained so, after the rebrand as Virgin Australia***
AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/ANDREW HUNT

virginblue.com.au
VH-VUJ

ABOVE: ***Virgin Blue Boeing 737-8FE, VH-VUJ (c/n 34443) joined the fleet in September 2006 and still serves with the airline*** CHRIS FRAME

mistakes other entrants had made and countered them. "The difference was to marry a low-cost airline to the Virgin brand, and that's what was lacking before, a reputable brand. Virgin is an incredible name that immediately attracted travellers."

Early services were focused on the east coast, adding a significant boost to the number of affordable seats on some of the most lucrative air routes in Australia. The airline's early success was a welcome change for the Australian traveller – welcomed by all – with one notable exception: Ansett. Established in 1936, Ansett had been a staple of the Australian aviation landscape for so long it had become a household name, but the post-deregulation era had not been kind to it. In the years following deregulation, it attempted to broaden its appeal to business travellers, establishing international services and joining Star Alliance. It was fully acquired by Air New Zealand in 2000, and even sponsored the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, to expand brand awareness to international travellers.

However, Ansett was plagued with high costs and Virgin Blue's low-cost model only added to its woes. In 2001, following the business mantra 'if you can't beat them, buy them' Ansett made an offer to acquire Virgin Blue. What happened next would be pivotal for both carriers, as Thomas recalled: "The problem was the offer came from Ansett which had Singapore Airlines as a shareholder, via Air New Zealand. Singapore Airlines had paid too much for the slice of Virgin Atlantic it owned, and didn't want to get ripped off again. So, with Virgin Blue they tried to haggle and beat the price down."

Tensions were high at Ansett and its parent Air New Zealand, as the carrier pinned its hopes on acquiring Virgin Blue. However, as Thomas remembered, the transition was rebuffed in spectacular Branson fashion: "In an incredible stunt at Sydney Airport, [he] held a press conference and declared: 'I've decided to sell Virgin Blue... Only joking!' and then tore up a fake cheque. And when he tore that cheque up, that was the end of Ansett."

Ansett collapsed in September 2001, and in a strange twist of events, Virgin Blue found itself in a position to acquire the larger carrier – but ultimately steered clear of the stricken airline. Instead, it scaled up its own expansion plans and settled on the 737-800 as its main workhorse, ultimately growing its fleet to serve Australia's major cities, as well as leisure and regional hubs. Despite the full-service void, it maintained its low-cost model and Thomas shed some light on the reason: "It was in Virgin Blue's DNA to stay in the low-cost segment, and they just thought: 'we'll just expand with what we know, with

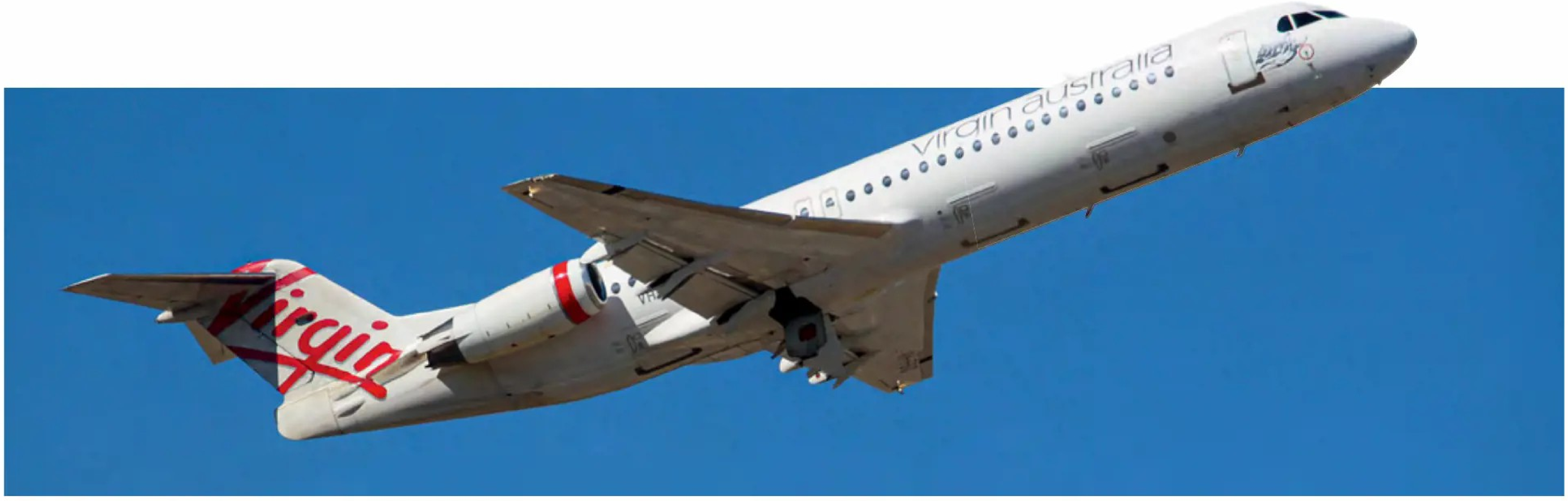
virgin australia
Virgin

LEFT: ***Boeing 737-8FE, VH-YFF (c/n 40994) arrived from the factory in May 2011, and still flies for the carrier*** VIRGIN AUSTRALIA

virgin australia
Virgin

BELOW: ***Airbus A320-232, VH-YUD (c/n 1922), joined Skywest Airlines in April 2013, and was consumed into Virgin Australia Regional Airlines then Virgin Australia the following month, where it remained until January 2023*** VIRGIN AUSTRALIA

> **"Key to this transformation was investment in new hard product, matched by a rebrand as Virgin Australia in May 2011"**



ABOVE: ***The airline has operated a total of 14 Fokker 100s during its time, including VH-FZI (c/n 11333), which served from August 2014 to December 2021*** CHRIS FRAME

Virgin Australia fleet

Aircraft	Number
Airbus A320-200	5
Boeing 737-700	9
Boeing 737-800	79
Boeing 737 MAX 8	8
Fokker 100	4
Total	**105**

the operation we have.' And for years they were successful."

Straying from low-cost

The mid-2000s saw a great deal of change within Virgin Blue as it expanded its domestic footprint and introduced enhanced amenities, such as a pay-per-visit lounge offering called The Blue Room. It moved further from the traditional low-cost model by launching its own frequent flyer programme, Velocity, and partnered with multiple international carriers, including Emirates, so members could earn and burn miles. The network was enhanced with the establishment of Pacific Blue to fly services to New Zealand and supplemented by Polynesian Blue, the flag carrier of Samoa part owned by Virgin Blue.

Domestically, it pushed into the lower end of the business market, by introducing a premium economy offering on its 737s. Similar in design to a European business class, it offered a blocked middle seat but fell well short of the dedicated business class recliners offered by Qantas.

RIGHT: ***Virgin Australia Airbus A330-200, VH-XFC (c/n 1293) was one of eight that served in the fleet, and currently operates for Spanish carrier, Level*** CHRIS FRAME

A fully owned subsidiary called V Australia was launched in February 2009, operating Boeing 777-300ERs between Australia and the US. The name added yet another brand to a company that was unable to use the Virgin name; as attributed to Virgin Atlantic stakeholder Singapore Airlines' unwillingness to allow it on international routes. As Virgin Blue approached its tenth anniversary it had grown significantly, yet was unquestionably straying from the traditional low-cost model.

Everything everywhere

Founding CEO Brett Godfrey left the carrier he created in 2010, to be replaced by former Qantas executive John Borghetti. His stewardship saw significant change, transforming the carrier from a low-cost enterprise into a full-service airline, with arguably the best product in Australian skies. Key to this transformation was investment in new hard product, matched by a rebrand as Virgin Australia in May 2011, which aimed to capture a larger share of the lucrative business market. The media event coincided with the arrival of a new flagship domestic product – the Airbus A330-200.

The first pair of A330s; VH-XFA (c/n 365), and VH-XFB (c/n 372), were ex-Emirates aircraft, and entered service in their Emirates-era two-class configuration. These were followed by six factory fresh A330-200s, sporting »

BELOW: ***ATR 72-600, VH-FVR (c/n 1058), was operated from December 2012 until January 2022 and was one of 14 ATRs in service with the airline*** CHRIS FRAME

ABOVE: *The airline has competed with Qantas on domestic services for several years* VINCENZO PACE

> **"Twenty-five years on from its first flight, the carrier continues to see itself as a challenger, and despite a changing business model, challenges, and a rebirth, it still brings a distinct Virgin experience to travellers"**

a modern interior, new angled flat beds in business class – later updated to fully flat beds, a menu designed by Australian chef Luke Mangan and international style onboard service. In addition to the A330s, used primarily on transcontinental services, business class was introduced across the 737 fleet. To further enhance its offering, the airline transformed the casual and cheerful Blue Rooms into chic and elegant spaces relaunched as 'The Lounge'.

In 2012, Virgin Australia acquired a majority stake in low-cost airline Tigerair Australia, which it intended to compete with Qantas' Jetstar. The following year, it expanded its footprint across Western Australia, acquiring regional airline Skywest. It was relaunched as Virgin Australia Regional Airlines, adding to existing subsidiaries Pacific Blue and V Australia. In a very short time, Virgin Blue had morphed into a fully integrated carrier with a top-quality product.

Qantas responded, with product improvements that instigated a golden age of Australian domestic travel, and it had an ace up its sleeve – the Qantas frequent flyer programme. Thomas recalled: "When they got John Borghetti, his strategy was clever, with a proviso. It was clever to marry the culture and the pizzazz of Virgin with top in-flight product, and in essence recreate Qantas with a way lower cost base. Only problem with that was Virgin paid too much to fast track that process, and the Qantas frequent flyers were wedded to their points, and they wouldn't move to Virgin."

Qantas' decades long head start building its frequent flyer programme meant Virgin Australia had a lot of work to do. The product was unquestionably appealing, yet Thomas argued that the lure of points and status with Qantas was a major sticking point: "The strategy would have worked if corporates had split the business 50/50. But the biggest flaw in this strategy was they [Virgin Australia] didn't have an overseas network.

BELOW: *The airline currently has eight Boeing 737 MAX 8s in service* BOEING

Go back 20 [or] so years when, when Qantas was allowed to merge with Australian Airlines, suddenly, you had a massive domestic and international networks. Virgin could not compete with it, therefore, the corporates stayed with Qantas, as they wanted to use their points to take their family overseas."

It all happened at once

John Borghetti departed the airline in March 2019 to be replaced by Paul Scurrah, who had just a year in the CEO hotseat before the largest global transportation disruption of modern times appeared: COVID-19. Australia's border closures from March 2020 were a significant step to manage the impact of the pandemic, but they put great pressure on the nation's airlines which could not even fly domestically at times, due to state border closures. Thomas said: "I was lobbying very strongly for the Australian government to step up, as they have done in various other jurisdictions. And I was one of the few people who warned that unless the government stepped in, Qantas and Virgin would come out of COVID, battered and bruised."

And while Qantas did emerge bruised, Virgin Australia was sucker punched, falling into administration in April 2020. For some, this moment had uncomfortable parallels to the Ansett collapse – as Virgin found itself burdened by its aggressive expansion programme at a time where it needed »

ABOVE: ***The Tigerair Australia brand was intended to compete with Qantas' Jetstar, but in 2020 Bain Capital retired it*** CHRIS FRAME

BELOW: ***The airline currently operates seven permanent and two seasonal routes from Adelaide Airport*** CHRIS FRAME

virgin australia
Virgin
VH-YIW

ABOVE: ***The Brisbane-headquartered carrier has leased Boeing 777s from Qatar Airways for its international services to Doha, from Sydney, Brisbane and Perth*** VINCENZO PACE

RIGHT: ***Dave Emerson has been tasked with steering the airline into the future*** VIRGIN AUSTRALIA

to be as lean as possible. However, unlike Ansett, Virgin's phoenix rose from the ashes, as the airline was acquired by Bain Capital. Scurrah left following the acquisition and was replaced by former Jetstar boss Jayne Hrdlicka. Under Bain, the airline went back to basics, shedding the widebody fleet, dropping Tigerair and culling international services to focus on building a strong domestic base.

Thomas recalled: "Bain Capital saw the value when you had a great airline which was weighed down by all that excessive baggage that Borghetti had hoped would attract the corporates. But he paid too much for it, and the corporates didn't support him, so that's why it didn't work. The fundamentals of the airline were brilliant. Get rid of all the baggage, 777s, A330s, all the other stuff that they had, the bare bones of it were a great airline. So, Bain picked it up for a song."

Rebirth

The years following the pandemic have seen a story of renewal at Virgin Australia. It re-established itself on the domestic market and is channelling its unique approach into a variety of new ventures. Lisa Burquest, chief people officer said the origin of the airline still plays a role in its approach: "The challenger philosophy established by our founders remains a key part of our DNA, and we continue to seek new ways to reinvent flying."

Notable recent changes include Qatar Airways' 2024 purchase of 25% of Virgin Australia. The relationship has created the opportunity for it to lease 777s from Qatar and commence international services to Doha, from Sydney, Brisbane and Perth from June 2025, adding Melbourne-Doha from December 2025. Thomas predicts big things for the future: "Qatar just bought a heap of 787s, and I would suggest that 20+ of these are going to go to Virgin over the next ten years. They'll lease them off Qatar, or Qatar will allocate off the production line to Virgin... and they will feed international traffic into the domestic network. Virgin will have synergy of [a] domestic and international network."

In March 2025 Jayne Hrdlicka stood down as CEO to be replaced by the airline's CCO, Dave Emerson. Twenty-five years on from its first flight, the carrier continues to see itself as a challenger, and despite a changing business model, challenges, and a rebirth, it still brings a distinct Virgin experience to travellers. Burquest attributes this to the quality of the airline's people, and told *Airliner World*: "Our people are the heart of our organisation, and the unique Virgin flair that they each bring to their roles remains the biggest factor in our success. They are genuinely passionate about the care and service they provide our customers."

Having returned to profitability in the 2023 financial year, the future looks bright. The airline is set to leverage new partnerships, enjoys high levels of customer satisfaction, and has welcomed over 13 million members to its Velocity loyalty programme. Burquest said it best: "It's a testament to the continued challenger philosophy that underpins our approach, and the unwavering passion and dedication of our 8,000 strong people. We're never done getting better and are focused on doing so every day."

BELOW: ***Twenty-five years on from its first flight, the carrier continues to see itself as a challenger and still brings a distinct Virgin experience to its passengers*** VIRGIN AUSTRALIA

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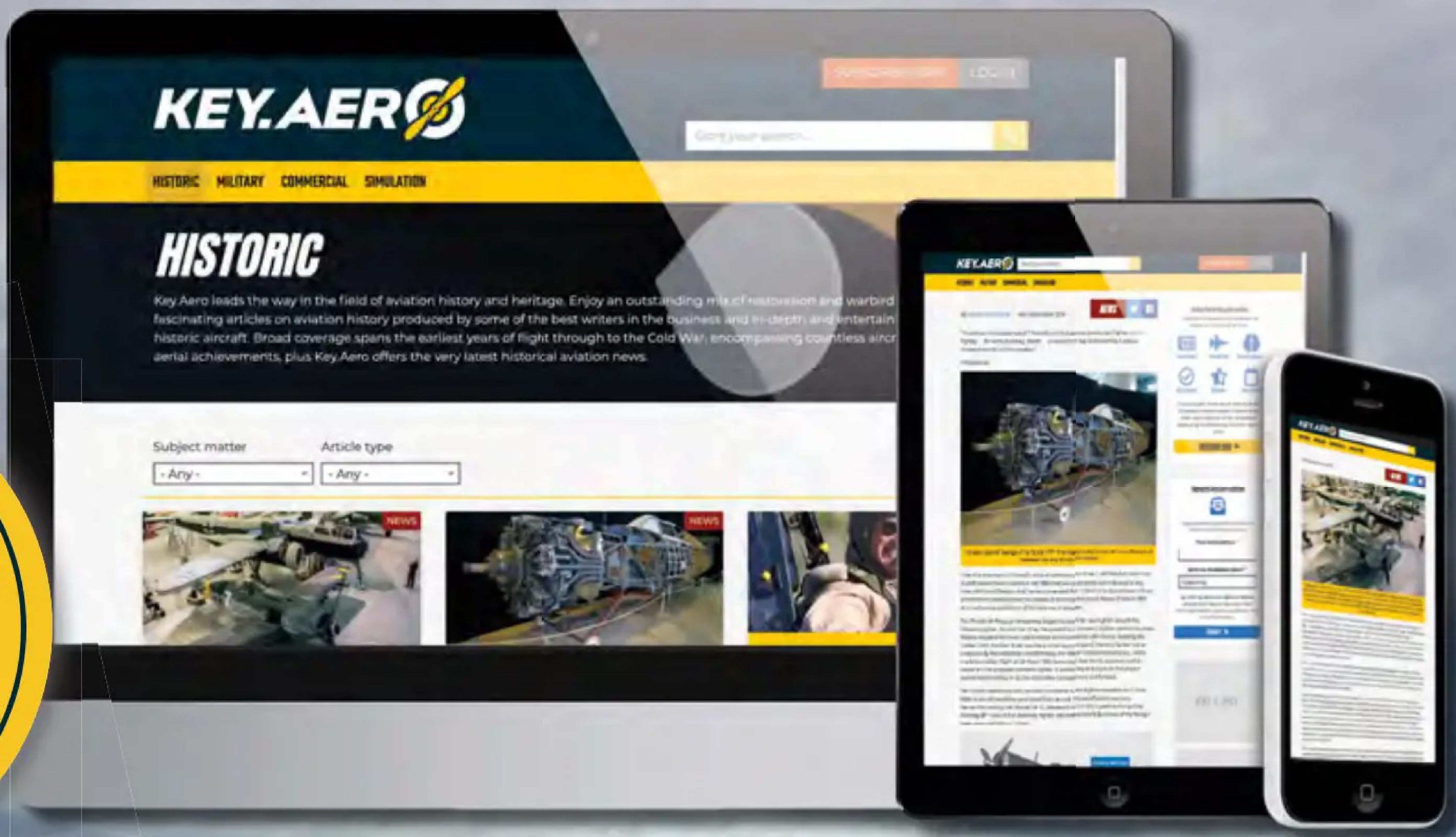

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Airliner Deliveries

The latest commercial aircraft deliveries from manufacturers and lessors

Taiwanese flag carrier China Airlines took delivery of Airbus A321neo, B-18117 (c/n 12415), on April 11, 2025. The narrowbody is its 16th example and is configured to seat 180 passengers in a two-class layout
AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/TMTAVIATION

AirSial [PF/SIF 'Air Sial']

AP-BPG	A320-214	4160	ex JY-AZB, dd 23.05.25, lsd fr BOC Aviation

Air Botswana [BP/BOP 'Botswana']

V5-ABQ	Emb-145LR	14501022	ex 2-BOTS, dd 02.05.25, lsd fr Westair Aviation
V5-ABW	Emb-145LR	14501040	ex 2-WANA, dd 09.05.25, lsd fr Westair Aviation

Air Arabia [G9/ABY 'Arabia']

YL-LDF	A320-214	4061	ex VP-CYC, dd 18.05.25, lsd fr/op by SmartLynx
YL-LDW	A320-214	3215	ex 2-MRNO, dd 14.05.25, lsd fr/op by SmartLynx
YL-LDX	A320-214	3221	ex 2-MREF, dd 18.05.25, lsd fr/op by SmartLynx

Emirates [EK/UAE 'Emirates']

A6-EFY	B777-F	68620	ff 19.03.25, dd 21.04.25

Etihad Airways [EY/ETD 'Etihad']

A6-XWG	A350-1041	717	ex F-WZNB, ff 06.03.25, dd 07.04.25

flydubai [FZ/FBD 'Sky Dubai']

A6-FQE	B737-8	61027	ff 05.03.25, dd 04.04.25

Qatar Airways [QR/QTR 'Qatari']

A7-AEP	A330-343E	1572	ex A4O-DH, dd 19.05.25, lsd fr Oman Air

Air China [CA/CCA 'Air China']

B-658H	C919-100ER	27	ex B-002V, ff 21.05.25, dd 30.05.25

Central Airlines [I9/HLF 'Homeland']

B-227H	B777-F1H	35611	ex A6-EFK, dd 15.05.25, lsd fr DAE Capital

China Cargo Airlines [CK/CKK 'Cargo King']

B-226V	B777-F	69512	ff 21.03.25, dd 08.04.25

China Eastern Airlines [MU/CES 'China Eastern']

B-32LX	A321-251nx	12496	ex B-007L, ff 05.03.25, dd 29.04.25
B-659A	ARJ21-700	10167	ex B-099R, ff 10.05.25, dd 30.05.25

China Southern Airlines [CZ/CSN 'China Southern']

B-32LM	A319-153n	12495	ex D-AVWF, ff 25.03.25, dd 24.04.25
B-32LN	A320-251n	12516	ex F-WWDF, ff 27.03.25, dd 25.04.25
B-32LQ	A321-251nx	12510	ex B-007N, ff 19.03.25, dd 11.04.25
B-32LR	A320-251n	12537	ex B-007P, ff 14.03.25, dd 02.04.25
B-32LX	A321-251nx	12496	ex B-007L, ff 05.03.25, dd 29.04.25
B-32M3	A321-251nx	12550	ex B-007Q, ff 21.03.25, dd 21.04.25
B-32M5	A321-251nx	12569	ex B-007R, ff 27.03.25, dd 25.04.25
B-226J	B737-8	65275	ex N5515R, N1784B, N1779B, N1799B, N1786B, ff 15.10.19, dd 04.04.25
B-658P	C919-100STD	25	ex B-002T, ff 04.05.25, dd 21.05.25
B-658Z	ARJ21-700	10181	ex B-099A, ff 25.04.25, dd 27.05.25

Tianjin Airlines [GS/GCR 'Bo Hai']

B-3175	ERJ190-100LR	19000405	ex PT-TYY, dd 13.05.25
B-3186	ERJ190-100LR	19000489	ex PT-TPO, dd 02.05.25

China Airlines [CI/CAL 'Dynasty']

B-18117	A321-271nx	12415	ex D-AZWZ, ff 26.03.25, dd 11.04.25, lsd fr China Aircraft Leasing Group

EVA Air [BR/EVA 'Eva']

B-17886	B787-9	63522	ff 03.11.24, dd 08.04.25
B-17888	B787-9	63526	ff 12.03.25, dd 14.04.25

Mandarin Airlines [AE/MDA 'Mandarin']

B-18653	B737-8Q8	41788	dd 27.05.25 Taipei TPE – Kaohsiung, lsd fr AerCap

Starlux Airlines [JX/SJX 'Starwalker']

B-58510	A350-951	718	ex F-WZFW, ff 20.03.25, dd 11.04.25

Air Canada [AC/ACA 'Air Canada']

C-FEGI	B787-9	66993	ff 12.03.25, dd 01.04.25 & reg'd same day, fleet # '862'
C-FFJG	B737-8	63388	ex N4022T, ff 01.04.25, dd 28.04.25 & reg'd same day, lsd fr BOC Aviation

Air Tindi [8T/TID 'Tindi']

C-FEXZ	DHC-8 314	319	ex G-BRYJ, dd 04.05.25, lsd fr Voyageur Airways

Alkan Air [TO/AKN 'Alkan Air']

C-GIWD	DHC-6 300	721	ex XA-UOA, dd 02.04.25 & reg'd 29.05.25

Amik Aviation

C-FPOS	Cessna 208	20800315	ex N126JK, reg'd 23.05.25

Buffalo Airways [J4/BFL 'Buffalo']

C-FTXI	Cl.215	1016	reg'd 15.05.25

Can-West Corporate Air Charters

C-FTVB	Cessna 208B	208B0089	ex N415TG, reg'd 29.05.25, (N415TG canx 28.05.25)
C-FTVL	Cessna 208B/EX	208B5874	reg'd 13.05.25

Chrono Aviation [MB/MBK 'Matblack']

C-FHNM	B737-8Q8	30631	ex N730WG, dd 30.04.25 Montreal TMX – Montreal YHU, rr C-GCUA 12.05.25

Inland Air Charters

C-GAEF	DHC-2 Mk.I	372	ex 51-16830, reg'd 02.05.25

Kitchi Airways

C-GATO	DHC-2 Mk.I	330	ex N212NY, reg'd 15.05.25, was canx 22.11.24

Red Sucker Lake Air Service

CF-HGZ	DHC-2 Mk.I	759	reg'd 28.05.25
C-GRWN	Pa.31-350	31-8152044	ex N4076J, reg'd 28.05.25

WestJet [WS/WJA 'Westjet']

C-FPRP	B737-8FH	39959	dd 08.05.25 & reg'd 14.05.25, lsd fr SMBC Aviation Capital
C-FTXE	B737-8	43301	ex N5573P, dd 20.05.25, lsd fr Air Lease Corp
C-FTXF	B737-8	43303	ex N1798B, dd 14.05.25, lsd fr Air Lease Corp
C-FYJD	B737-8Q8	41807	ex N1795B, dd 15.05.25, lsd fr AerCap
C-GBZS	B737-8SH	42053	ex N1798B, dd 29.05.25, lsd fr Air Lease Corp
C-GFEH	B737-8GS	1608	dd 22.05.25, lsd fr AerCap
C-GMXB	B737-8	60387	ex N1795B, dd 21.05.25, lsd fr Air Lease Corp

JetSMART [JA/JAT 'Rocksmart']

CC-DIS	A321-271nx	12430	ex D-AZAY, ff 13.03.25, dd 24.04.25, named 'Mono Ardilla'
CC-DIT	A320-271n	12514	ex F-WWTY, ff 12.03.25, dd 22.04.25, named 'Oso Melero'

Royal Air Maroc [AT/RAM 'Royalair Maroc']

9H-HFH	A330-202	950	ex G-KJAS, dd 12.05.25 Beja – Oujda, lsd fr/op by HiFly Malta

TAP Air Portugal [TP/TAP 'Air Portugal')

LY-NVH	A321-231	2653	ex VP-CBX, dd 31.05.25, lsd fr/op by Avion Express
9H-GTS	A320-232	4384	ex VT-IGT, dd 30.04.25 Vilnius – Lisbon & entered service 01.05.25, lsd fr/op by Airhub Airlines

LAM - Linhas Aéreas de Moçambique [TM/LAM 'Mozambique']

TL-VIP	B737-529	26538	ex EY-560, dd 05.05.25 & entered service 06.05.25, lsd fr/op by Via Air

AeroLogic [3S/BOX 'German Cargo']

D-AALX	B777-F	68145	ff 14.03.25, dd 03.04.25, lsd fr/op for DHL
D-AALY	B777-F	68146	ff 08.04.25, dd 28.04.25, lsd fr/op for DHL

Eurowings [EW/EWG 'Eurowings']

9H-SWC	A320-232	3734	ex EI-HJL, dd 03.05.25, lsd fr/op by Avion Express Malta

Lufthansa City Airlines [VL/LHX 'Cityair']

D-AIJP	A320-271n	12540	ex D-AUAF, ff 18.03.25, dd 08.04.25 to Lufthansa, named 'Ingelheim am Rhein'

Air Europa [UX/AEA 'Europa']

EC-OGY	B787-9	43983	ex OE-IBM, dd 05.05.25, lsd fr SMBC Aviation Capital

Binter Canarias [NT/IBB 'Binter']

EC-OLZ	ERJ190-400	19020170	ex PR-EIJ, dd 07.04.25

Swiftair [WT/SWT 'Swift']

SE-RLJ	B737-8Q8(F)	30671	ex N858AM, dd 22.02.25, lsd fr West Air Sweden

Key to Abbreviations

a/c	aircraft
als	airlines
awys	airways
bf	bought from
b/u	broken up/scrapped
canx	cancelled
cls	colours
cn	manufacturer's construction/serial number
cnvrtd	converted
dbf	destroyed by fire
dbr	damaged beyond repair
dd	delivery date
ex	previous reg'n
ff	first flight
frtr	freighter
lrf	last revenue flight
lsd fr	leased from
lsd to	leased to
msn	see cn
ntu	not taken up
oo	on order
op	operated
pax	passenger
pwfu	permanently withdrawn from use
reg'd	registered
reg'n	registration
ret fr	returned from
ret to	returned to
rr	re-registered
rts	return to service
sb	sold by
scr	scrapped/broken up
st	sold to
std	stored
tba	to be advised
unk	unknown
wfu	withdrawn from use
w/o	written off/destroyed

Volotea [V7/VOE 'Volotea']

EC-OOC	A320-214	4347	ex OE-IEL, dd 14.05.25, lsd fr Avolon Aerospace, named 'Born To Fly'

Vueling [VY/VLG 'Vueling']

EC-NUO	A320-214	5232	ex OE-IPA, dd 22.05.25, lsd fr AerCap
EC-NUP	A320-214	5304	ex F-HBBF, dd 15.05.25, lsd fr AerCap

Emerald Airlines [EA/EAI 'Gemstone']

EI-HPK	ATR 72-212A (600)	1249	ex M-ABRP, dd 12.05.25, lsd fr ACIA Aero Leasing

Ryanair [FR/RYR 'Ryanair']

EI-IKX	B737-8200	62389	ex N4022T, ff 01.04.25, dd 22.04.25 & reg'd same day
EI-IKY	B737-8200	62387	ex N4022L, N4022T, ff 14.03.25, dd 07.04.25 & reg'd same day
EI-IKZ	B737-8200	62386	ex N4022T, ff 02.04.25, dd 14.04.25 & reg'd same day

SAS Connect [SL/SZS 'Spinnaker']

EI-SCF	A320-251n	12528	ex F-WWTO, ff 07.04.25, dd 29.04.25 & reg'd same day to Scandinavia Airlines Ireland Ltd, named 'Frejdis Viking'

FLYONE Armenia [3F/FIE 'Armrider']

XU-730	A320-251n	9173	ex OE-LFJ, dd 24.05.25 & entered service 26.05.25, lsd fr/op by Sky Angkor Airlines

SmartLynx Estonia [MYX 'Tallinn Cat']

ES-SAB	A320-214	3644	ret fr Air Peace lease

Sapsan

EX-76030	Il-76TD	1013409295	ex EX-76015, dd 05.25

Air France Hop [A5/HOP 'Air Hop']

F-HBQA	ERJ190-100STD	19000654	ex PH-EZZ, reg'd 13.05.25 to TrueNoord Amstel Ltd

Amelia International [8R/AIA 'Amelia']

F-HDSJ	A319-112	3727	ret fr Bangkok Airways lease

Transavia France [TO/TVF 'France Soleil']

F-HXSN	A320-252n	12502	ex F-WWDO, ff 29.03.25, dd 11.04.25 & reg'd to Avolon Leasing Ireland 3 Ltd 14.04.25
F-HXSO	A320-25n	12548	ex D-AZYZ, ff 09.04.25, dd 28.04.25, lsd fr Accipter & reg'd to Maverick Leasing (Ireland) DAC 29.04.25

Ascend Airways [YD/SYG 'Synergy']

G-ULIT	B737-8	43001	ex 9H-TAU, reg'd 26.05.25, lsd fr SMBC Aviation Capital

BA Euroflyer [A0/EFW 'Griffin']

G-EUUV	A320-232	3468	ex F-WWBO, dd 30.04.25 & entered service 02.05.25, lsd fr SMBC Aviation Capital
G-EUUY	A320-232	3607	ex F-WWIC, dd 25.05.25 & entered service 01.06.25, lsd fr SMBC Aviation Capital

Blue Islands [SI/BCI 'Blue Islands']

G-ISLP	ATR 72-212A (600)	1167	ex N167JL, reg'd 15.05.25, lsd fr Jetstream Aviation Capital, (N167JL canx 14.05.25)

British Airways [BA/BAW 'Speedbird']

G-TTSD	A320-251n	12453	ex F-WWBT, ff 01.04.25, dd 17.04.25 & reg'd same day
G-TTSE	A320-251n	12483	ex F-WWDZ, ff 13.03.25, dd 07.04.25 & reg'd same day

easyJet Airline [U2/EZY 'Easy']

G-UZEH	A320-251n	12551	ex B-005C, ff 20.03.25, dd 09.04.25 & reg'd same day

Jet2.com [LS/EXS 'Channex']

9A-KOR	B737-8GJ	34899	ex G-BBRV, dd 09.05.25, lsd fr/op by ETF Airways

TUI Airways [BY/TOM 'Tomjet']

EI-FFA	B737-8K5	38097	ex G-TUKM, dd 29.04.25, lsd fr/op by Fly4 Airlines
EI-FFB	B737-8K5	37243	ex G-TAWL, dd 22.05.25, lsd fr/op by Fly4 Airways
EI-FFC	B737-8K5	37251	ex G-TAWN, dd 22.05.25, lsd fr/op by Fly4 Airways
EI-FFD	B737-8K5	40944	ex OO-JAY, dd 22.05.25, lsd fr/op by Fly4 Airways
G-CRUX	B737-8	44863	ex 9H-ORN, dd 22.05.25, lsd fr/op by Ascend Airways
G-LESO	B737-8	64606	ex 9H-HYA, dd 23.05.25, lsd fr/op by Ascend Airways
G-TAWZ	B737-86N	32669	ex OO-SRO, reg'd 13.05.25, lsd fr AerCap
OM-MEX	B737-8GJ	34905	ex EI-FGC, dd 05.05.25, lsd fr/op by AirExplore
SE-RFZ	B787-9	44579	ex G-TUIK, dd 02.05.25, lsd fr/op by TUIfly Nordic

Swiss International Air Lines [LX/SWR 'Swiss']

HB-JDK	A320-271n	12565	ex D-AVXW, ff 11.04.25, dd 29.04.25 & reg'd 28.04.25, named 'Romanshorn'

avianca Cargo [QT/TPA 'Tampa']

N338QT	A330-343(F)	1382	ex VP-CKD, reg'd 14.05.26 to Bank of Utah Trustee, lsd fr CDB Aviation

Korean Air [KE/KAL 'Korean']

HL8538	B787-10	60303	ff 07.09.24, dd 01.04.25 & reg'd same day
HL8570	B787-10	66879	ff 11.04.25, dd 25.04.25 & reg'd 30.04.25
HL8710	A321-272nx	12353	ex F-WWAU, ff 06.03.25, dd 16.04.25 & reg'd same day

Ezy Airlines [EZT]

HS-EZY	Cessna 208B/EX	208B5793	ex N716CA, dd 06.24

Thai AirAsia [FD/AIQ 'Thai Asia']

HS-EAG	A321-251nx	12494	ex D-AYAN, ff 31.03.24, dd 11.04.25, lsd fr AerCap

flynas [XY/KNE 'Nas Express']

HZ-NS89	A320-251n	12506	ex F-WWBU, ff 11.03.25, dd 14.04.25
HZ-NS92	A320-251n	12614	ex B-005D, ff 08.04.25, dd 29.04.25

ITA Airways [AZ/ITY 'Itarrow']

I-ADVH	A220-100	50084	ex C-FOUQ, ff 04.04.25, dd 16.04.25

SkyAlps [BQ/SWU 'Skyalps']

SX-RMA	ERJ190-200STD	19000361	ex N361AZ, dd 27.05.25, lsd fr/op by Marathon Airlines

Royal Jordanian [RJ/RJA 'Jordanian']

JY-RAC	A320-271n	12384	ex F-WWIF, ff 09.04.25, dd 28.04.25, lsd fr Avolon Aerospace

Andes Líneas Aéreas [OY/ANS 'Aeroandes']

LV-ARR	B737-7K2	38125	ex 2-CCXB, dd 29.05.25, lsd fr Babcock & Brown

Avion Express [X9/NVD 'Nordvind']

LY-VEL	A320-232	1998	ret fr Transavia lease

Heston Airlines [HN/HST 'Heston']

LY-MAD	A320-216	3956	ex EI-DTH, dd 26.03.25
LY-MAF	A320-232	1922	ex YR-BUZ, dd 01.05.25, lsd fr Banc of America Leasing

Electra Airways [E4/EAF 'Electra']

LZ-EAH	A320-214	2930	ret fr AMC Aviation lease

Fly2Sky [F6/VAW 'Sofia Jet']

LZ-FSD	A320-214	3461	ret fr SkyUp Europe lease

GullivAir [G2/BGB 'Vagabond']

LZ-TWO	A330-223	493	ret fr RwandAir lease

Allegiant Air [G4/AAY 'Allegiant']

N818NV	B737-8200	68012	ex N4026T, N4022T, ff 25.03.25, dd 23.04.25 & reg'd 09.05.25

American Airlines [AA/AAL 'American']

N306UH	B737-8	44512	ex N4022T, ff 18.03.25, dd 09.04.25 & reg'd same day, fleet # '3UH'
N307UJ	B737-8	44513	ex N4022T, ff 27.03.25, dd 22.04.25 & reg'd same day, fleet # '3UJ'
N845MD	B787-9	66010	ff 28.02.25, dd 29.04.25 & reg'd 30.04.25 to Wilmington Trust Co Trustee, fleet # '8MD'
N846AN	B787-9	66011	ff 13.12.24, dd 29.04.25 & reg'd same day to Wilmington Trust Co Trustee, fleet # '8ME'

Avelo Airlines [VX/VXP 'Avelo']

N566MQ	B737-8EH	36566	ex PR-GGG, dd 01.05.25, lsd fr Macquaire AirFinance

Delta Air Lines [DL/DAL 'Delta']

N329DU	A220-300	55328	ex C-GPQI, ff 25.03.25, dd 21.04.25 & reg'd 22.04.25, fleet # '8329'
N333DU	A220-300	55349	ex C-FOUY, ff 21.04.25, dd 28.04.25 & reg'd same day, fleet # '8333'
N528DN	A350-941	722	ex F-WZHJ, ff 04.04.25, dd 30.04.25 & reg'd same day to Bank of Utah Trustee, fleet # '3528'

FedEx Express [FX/FDX 'Fedex']

N252FE	B767-300F	67541	ff 27.02.25, dd 29.04.25 & reg'd 14.05.25, named Florence

jetBlue Airways [B6/JBU 'Jet Blue']

N3257J	A220-300	55342	ex C-GPQP, ff 03.04.25, dd 22.04.25 & reg'd 23.04.25, named 'Comment Allez-Blue?'

Republic Airline [YX/RPA 'Brickyard']

N780YX	ERJ170-200LR	17000991	ex PR-EIY, dd 21.05.25

SkyWest Airlines [OO/SKW 'Skywest']

N248LR	CRJ.900LR	15274	ex C-GUHY, reg'd 21.05.25
N877AS	CRJ.200LR	7579	ex C-FMMQ, dd 27.05.25, ops for United Express

Southwest Airlines [WN/SWA 'Southwest']

N8945Q	B737-8	68632	ex N4022T, ff 14.03.25, dd 03.04.25 & reg'd same day
N8947Q	B737-8	68631	ex N4022T, ff 27.03.25, dd 10.04.25 & reg'd same day
N8948Q	B737-8	68630	ex N4027T, N4022T, ff 03.04.25, dd 21.04.25 & reg'd same day
N8949Q	B737-8	68629	ff 09.04.25, dd 24.04.25 & reg'd same day
N8951S	B737-8	42612	ff 18.04.25, dd 29.04.25 & reg'd 30.04.25

Spirit Airlines [NK/NKS 'Spirit Wing']

N746NK	A321-271nx	12423	ex F-WZMQ, ff 07.04.25, dd 17.04.25, lsd fr Air Lease Corp, fleet # '6746'

Sun Country Airlines [SY/SCX 'Sun Country']

N5113A	B737-83N(BCF)	32611	ex N843DM, dd 08.05.25, lsd fr Amazon.com Services & op for Amazon Prime Air

United Airlines [UA/UAL 'United']

N14528	A321-271nx	12354	ex D-AXKK, ff 28.03.25, dd 07.04.25, lsd fr China Aircraft Leasing Group, fleet # '4528'
N14536	A321-271nx	12424	ex F-WZMR, ff 11.04.25, dd 25.04.25 same day, fleet # '4536'
N17401	B737-9	43451	ff 12.04.25, dd 29.04.25 & reg'd same day to UMB Bank NA Trustee, fleet # '7401'
N17594	B737-9	43447	ex N4022T, ff 21.03.25, dd 21.04.25 & reg'd same day to Bank of Utah Trustee, fleet # '7594'
N17595	B737-9	67643	ex N4022T, ff 21.03.25, dd 17.04.25 & reg'd same day to Bank of Utah Trustee, fleet # '7595'
N17596	B737-9	67642	ex N4022T, ff 19.03.25, dd 22.04.25 & reg'd same day to Bank of Utah Trustee, fleet # '7596'
N17597	B737-9	67742	ex N4022T, ff 11.03.25, dd 09.04.25 & reg'd same day to Bank of Utah Trustee, fleet # '7597'
N24993	B787-9	38269	ff 27.03.25, dd 15.04.25 & reg'd same day, fleet # '0993'
N37367	B737-8	68821	ex N4022T, ff 21.03.25, dd 18.04.25 & reg'd same day, fleet # '7367'
N37368	B737-8	68809	ex N4022T, ff 25.03.25, dd 24.04.25 & reg'd same day, fleet # '7368'

Airliner Deliveries

We welcome any feedback on this listing

(The listing is alphabetical with reference to the registration of the country of origin. Columns indicate the registration, type, construction number and notes.)

The latest commercial aircraft deliveries from manufacturers and lessors

After 17 years with British Airways, Airbus A320-232, G-EUUY (c/n 3607), was transferred over to the flag carrier's London/Gatwick-based subsidiary BA Euroflyer on May 25 AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/SIMON WILLSON

N77598	B737-9	43448	ex N4022T, ff 07.04.25, dd 24.04.25 & reg'd same day to UMB Bank NA Trustee, fleet # '7598'

UPS Airlines [5X/UPS 'Ups']

N389UP	B767-300F	67978	ff 11.03.25, dd 16.04.25 & reg'd 08.05.25

Austrian Airlines [OS/AUA 'Austrian']

SE-MKK	ATR 72-212A (600)	1341	ex F-WWEZ, dd 01.05.25, lsd fr/op by Braathens Regional

DHL Air Austria [Q7/DHA 'Yellow Tail']

OE-LYB	B767-304ER(F)	28040	ex G-DHLL, reg'd 09.05.25

SmartWings [QS/TVS 'Sky Travel']

ES-SAY	A320-232	2689	ex OE-IET, dd 13.05.25 & entered service 15.05.25, lsd fr/op by SmartLynx Estonia
ES-SAZ	A320-232	3308	ex OE-IHZ, dd 16.05.25 Istanbul SAW – Brno & entered service 17.05.25, lsd fr/op by SmartLynx Estonia
OK-FYC	A220-300	55347	ex C-FPGP, ff 09.04.25, dd 17.04.25, lsd fr Air Lease Corp, in CSA Czech Airlines colours
OK-SWT	B737-7Q8	29346	ret fr Camair-Co lease
OK-TSE	B737-81D	39437	ret fr Sunwing Airlines lease
OK-TST	B737-86N	37884	as OK-TSE
OK-TVG	B737-8Q8	30719	ex C-FKVG, ret fr Sunwing Airlines lease
OK-TVM	B737-8FN	37077	ex C-FFVM, ret fr Sunwing Airlines lease
OK-TVR	B737-86N	38018	ret fr SpiceJet lease
OK-TVU	B737-86N	38025	ex C-FKVU, ret fr Sunwing Airlines lease
OK-TVV	B737-86N	38027	ex C-GKVV, ret fr Sunwing Airlines lease
OK-TVW	B737-86Q	30295	as OK-TSE
YL-LDE	A320-232	3330	ex 2-VIHA, dd 15.05.25, lsd fr/op by SmartLynx
YL-LDT	A320-232	6189	ex 9H-SZF, dd 21.05.25, lsd fr/op by SmartLynx
ZS-GAC	A320-232	2496	ex OE-IFG, dd 15.05.25, lsd fr/op by Global Aviation
9H-SLF	A320-214	3361	ex OE-IOD, dd 17.05.25, lsd fr/op by SmartLynx Malta

ASL Airlines Belgium [3V/TAY 'Quality']

OE-IXW	B737-8F2(BCF)	29782	ex OM-EDG, reg'd 23.05.25, lsd fr Babcock & Brown

TUIfly Belgium [TB/JAF 'Beauty']

LZ-FBH	A320-214	7238	ex OE-IKI, dd 05.05.25, lsd fr/op by Bulgaria Air
LZ-FSF	A320-214	3605	ex N279GX, dd 24.04.25, lsd fr/op by Fly2Sky

DAT [DX/DTR 'Danish']

OY-RUY	A320-232	6733	ret fr Uganda Airlines lease

Jettime [JP/JTD 'Jettime']

OY-JYD	B737-8SA	44221	ex 9V-MGE, dd 22.05.25, lsd fr AviLease

KLM Royal Dutch Airlines [KL/KLM 'Klm']

PH-AXE	A321-252nx	12473	ex D-AZYC, ff 24.03.25, dd 04.04.25 & reg'd same day, lsd fr Accipter, named 'Landkaartje / Map Butterfly'
PH-AXF	A321-252nx	12472	ex D-AZYI, ff 01.04.25, dd 15.04.25 & reg'd same day, named 'Dagpauwoog / Peacock Butterfly'

Transavia [HV/TRA 'Transavia']

LY-NVL	A320-232	4683	ex HA-LWJ, dd 03.05.25 & entered service 04.05.25, lsd fr/op by Avion Express
PH-YHU	A321-251nx	12451	ex D-AZXS, ff 20.03.25, dd 04.04.25 & reg'd same day, lsd fr SMBC Aviation Capital
9H-GKK	A320-232	6865	ex VT-TTJ, dd 27.05.25 & entered service 28.05.25, lsd fr/op by Avion Express Malta

TUIfly Nederlands [OR/TFL 'Orange']

OM-IEX	B737-8BK	33016	ex D-APBC, dd 05.05.25, lsd fr/op by AirExplore
OM-NEX	B737-8KN	29636	ex 2-KUTG, dd 28.04.25, lsd fr/op by AirExplore

Garuda Indonesia [GA/GIA 'Indonesia']

PK-GHI	A330-941	1887	ex PK-GYC, dd 03.05.25, lsd fr Avolon Aerospace

Azul Linhas Aéreas [AD/AZU 'Azul']

CS-TSW	B777-243ER	32782	ex EI-DBM, dd 27.04.25, lsd fr/op by Euro Atlantic Airways
PS-ADG	ERJ190-400	19020173	dd 07.05.25 & reg'd to Bank of Utah, named 'Quanto mais Azul, melhor'

LATAM Airlines Brasil [JJ/TAM 'Tam']

PR-XBX	A320-271n	12538	ex F-WWBJ, ff 08.04.25, dd 30.04.25, lsd fr DAE Capital
PS-LHB	A320-271n	8702	ex VT-IZP, dd 03.05.25, lsd fr Jackson Square Aviation

Bestfly Aruba [BFY 'Mwango Best']

P4-EMB	ERJ170-200STD	17000328	ex 2-RLBW, dd 14.05.25

SAS Link [SVS 'Discover']

SE-RSV	ERJ190-200LR	19000749	ex 9H-AKT, dd 23.05.25 to NAC Aviation 29 DAC

Buzz [RR/RYS 'Magic Sun']

SP-RZP	B737-8200	67117	ex N4022S, N4022T, ff 17.03.25, dd 07.04.25 to Ryanair
SP-RZV	B737-8200	62385	ex N4022T, ff 20.03.25, dd 04.04.25 to Ryanair

Enter Air [E4/ENT 'Enter']

OM-FEX	B737-8Q8	28213	ex N679AC, dd 02.05.25, lsd fr/op by AirExplore
OM-KEX	B737-8BK	33018	ex TF-KEX, dd 26.04.25, lsd fr/op by AirExplore

US-Bangla Airlines [BS/UBG 'Bangla Star']

PK-BBG	B737-86N	39390	ex VP-CAB, dd 04.05.25 & entered service 05.5.25, lsd fr/op by BBN Airlines Indonesia

AJet [VF/TKJ 'Anatolia']

TC-GPB	A321-231	3522	ex 9H-AKC, dd 19.05.25 & entered service same day, lsd fr/op by BBN Airlines Türkiye
TC-GPG	A321-231	2261	ex 9H-SLM, dd 14.05.25 & entered service same day, lsd fr/op by BBN Airlines Türkiye
9H-SLC	A321-211	4461	ex YL-LCY, dd 13.05.25 & entered service 14.05.25, lsd fr/op by SmartLynx Malta
9H-SLH	A320-214	3425	ex OE-LMN, dd 27.05.25 & entered service 28.05.25, lsd fr/op by SmartLynx Malta
9H-SLJ	A320-214	3880	ex EI-GVY, dd 03.05.25 & entered service same day, lsd fr/op by SmartLynx Malta

Corendon Airlines [XC/CAI 'Corendon']

TC-MKC	B737-8	65900	ret fr IndiGo lease

Freebird Airlines [FH/FHY 'Freebird Air']

TC-FBV	A320-214	4658	ret fr Vietjet Air lease
TC-FHC	A320-214	3852	as TC-FBV

Pegasus Airlines [PC/OGT 'Sunturk']

LY-NVE	A320-232	5496	ex 9V-TRH, dd 18.05.25, lsd fr/op by Avion Express
LY-NVF	A320-232	4094	ex SX-DGC, dd 25.05.25, lsd fr/op by Avion Express
TC-RFM	A321-251nx	12413	ex F-WWSA, ff 14.03.25, dd 18.04.25, named 'Lavin'

Southwind Airlines [2S/STW 'Moon Star']

TC-GRF	A321-231	5382	ex EK-AAD, dd 20.05.25, lsd fr Air Lease Corp

SunExpress [XQ/SXS 'Sunexpress']

LY-MLF	A320-232	2828	ex SX-DGN, dd 23.05.25 & entered service same day, lsd fr/op by Avion Express
LY-MLJ	A320-232	3877	ex OE-LID, dd 23.05.25 & entered service same day, lsd fr/op by Avion Express
LY-NVG	A320-214	4175	ex 2-AEIP, dd 21.05.25 & entered service same day, lsd fr/op by Avion Express
LY-NVM	A320-232	4628	ex LY-LGD, dd 21.05.25 & entered service same day, lsd fr/op by Avion Express
TC-SMV	B737-8	42826	ex 9H-ARI, dd 13.05.25, lsd fr DAE Capital
TC-SMZ	B737-8	42827	ex LZ-DCZ, dd 27.05.25, lsd fr DAE Capital
TC-SOE	B737-8HC	61177	ret fr South African Airways lease
TC-SRE	B737-8JP	39434	ex LZ-DCX, dd 05.25, lsd fr DAE Capital, entered service 23.05.25
TC-SRG	B737-8JP	39435	ex LN-NIE, dd 19.05.25, lsd fr Macquaire AirFinance
TC-TLI	B737-8FZ	29682	ex A4O-BM, dd 10.05.25 & entered service same day, lsd fr/op by Tailwind Als
TC-TLJ	B737-8Z9	34262	ex N342AM, dd 10.05.25 & entered service same day, lsd fr/op by Tailwind Als

Turkish Airlines [TK/THY 'Turkey']

TC-LBC	A321-231	6009	ex OE-IZR, dd 21.05.25, lsd fr Deucalion Aviation
TC-LBU	A320-232	5596	ex 9V-TRI, dd 29.05.25, lsd fr Jackson Square Aviation
TC-LHD	A350-941	725	ex F-WZGV, ff 18.03.25, dd 17.04.25

ULS Airlines Cargo [GO/KZU 'Universal Cargo']

TC-GOL	A330-343(F)	356	ex N804CM, dd 05.25, lsd fr Cargo Aircraft Management, (N804CM canx 01.05.25)

Icelandair [FI/ICE 'Iceair']

TF-IAD	A321-271nx	12503	ex D-AZAR, ff 20.03.25, dd 06.04.25, lsd fr SMBC Aviation Capital, named 'Ásbyrgi'

PLAY [OG/FPY 'Player']

9H-MLY	A320-232	3943	ex OE-IFJ, dd 18.05.25 & entered service 19.05.25, lsd fr/op by Avion Express Malta

Key to Abbreviations

a/c	aircraft
als	airlines
awys	airways
bf	bought from
b/u	broken up/scrapped
canx	cancelled
cls	colours
cn	manufacturer's construction/serial number
cnvrtd	converted
dbf	destroyed by fire
dbr	damaged beyond repair
dd	delivery date
ex	previous reg'n
ff	first flight
frtr	freighter
lrf	last revenue flight
lsd fr	leased from
lsd to	leased to
msn	see cn
ntu	not taken up
oo	on order
op	operated
pax	passenger
pwfu	permanently withdrawn from use
reg'd	registered
reg'n	registration
ret fr	returned from
ret to	returned to
rr	re-registered
rts	return to service
sb	sold by
scr	scrapped/broken up
st	sold to
std	stored
tba	to be advised
unk	unknown
wfu	withdrawn from use
w/o	written off/destroyed

Afrijet [J7/ABS 'Afrijet']

ZS-CMP	CRJ.900LR	15079	ex EC-JTU, dd 06.03.25, lsd fr/op by CemAir for Fly Gabon operations

Tunisair [TU/TAR 'Tunisair']

9H-AMH	A320-232	2173	ex LY-NVW, dd 22.05.25 & entered service 25.05.25, lsd fr/op by Avion Express Malta

My Freighter [C6/MFX 'Whitebird']

UK67020	B767-330ER(F)	26984	ex N460CM, dd 01.05.25, lsd fr Cargo Aircraft Management
UK67021	B767-330ER(F)	26986	ex N475CM, dd 22.05.25, lsd fr Cargo Aircraft Management

Skyline Express [QU/UTN 'UT Ukraine']

UR-SLX	B737-94XER	36087	ex TC-MGI, dd 05.25, lsd fr FTAI Aviation, entered service 23.05.25

Alliance Airlines [QQ/UTY 'Unity']

VH-A2J	ERJ190-100AR	19000039	ex N238JB, dd 30.05.25

Skytrans Airlines [QN/SKP 'Skytrans']

VH-TQG	DHC-8 201	430	ex N438SD, dd 09.05.25 to Bank of Utah, lsd fr Avmax Aircraft Leasing

Bamboo Airways [QH/BAV 'Bamboo']

PK-BBK	B737-9GPER	35717	ex 2-IBAZ, dd 26.05.25, lsd fr/op by BBN Airlines Indonesia

Vietjet Air [VJ/VJC 'Vietjetair']

VN-A516	A321-271nx	12536	ex D-AZAU, ff 11.04.25, dd 23.04.25

BermudAir [2T/BMA 'Gosling']

VQ-BLZ	ERJ190-100AR	19000275	ex LV-GAQ, dd 16.05.25, lsd fr Azorra Aviation, named 'Niel Jones'

Air India Express [IX/AXB 'Express India']

VT-BWO	B737-8	63281	ex N5515X, N5573L, N1781B, N1786B, ff 22.06.19, dd 17.04.25
VT-BWP	B737-8	63290	ex N5573B, N5573P, N1781B, ff 28.06.19, dd 18.04.25
VT-BWT	B737-8	63287	ex N57002, N5573K, N1800B, N1782B, N1786B, ff 02.04.19, dd 09.04.25
VT-BWW	B737-8	63277	ex N57004, N56807, N1784B, N1786B, ff 25.03.19, dd 11.04.25

Akasa Air [QP/SKJ 'Akasa Air']

VT-YBE	B737-8200	?	ex N4022T, ff 01.04.25, dd 29.04.25

IndiGo [6E/IGO 'Ifly']

VT-NCG	A321-251nx	12382	ex F-WWSB, ff 20.03.25, dd 16.04.25
VT-NCH	A321-251nx	12429	ex D-AZAK, ff 18.03.25, dd 03.04.25
VT-NCK	A321-251nx	12464	ex D-AZXX, ff 21.03.25, dd 07.04.25
VT-NCL	A321-251nx	12512	ex D-AYAG, ff 07.04.25, dd 28.04.25
VT-NCM	A321-251nx	12435	ex F-WWSC, ff 28.03.25, dd 22.04.25
VT-NCO	A321-251nx	12530	ex D-AYAP, ff 04.04.25, dd 22.04.25

Viva Aerobus [VB/VIV 'Viva']

XA-VXU	A321-271nx	12393	ex F-WZMW, ff 04.04.25, dd 17.04.25

Air Cambodia [K6/KHV 'Cambodia Air']

XU-610	ATR 72-212A (600)	1716	ex F-WNUF, ff 16.04.25 as F-WWEQ, dd 27.05.25, lsd fr Henan Aviation Investment Leasing

Animawings [A2/AWG 'Anima Wings']

YR-AGC	A320-232	3621	ex VP-CQA, dd 09.05.25, lsd fr Macquarie AirFinance

FLYONE Romania [OE/FOE 'First Eagle']

YR-FIA	A320-233	3524	ret fr Bamboo Airways lease

HelloJets [H3/HLJ 'Hellojets']

YR-HLA	B737-8HC	36529	ret fr LOT lease

Air Serbia [JU/ASL 'Air Serbia']

LZ-BUR	ERJ190-100AR	19000551	ex PT-TBV, dd 01.05.25 & entered service 02.05.25, lsd fr/op by Bulgaria Air

CemAir [5Z/KEM 'Cemair']

ZS-	CRJ.900ER	15038	ex N938LR, dd 14.05.25

South African Airways [SA/SAA 'Springbok']

ZS-SAI	B737-38J	27395	ex P4-JAR, dd 01.05.25 & entered service same day, lsd fr/op by Cobra Aviation

OneClick Airways

4L-TWO	B737-81B	35375	ex B-5300, dd 30.05.25

Arkia – Israeli Airlines [IZ/AIZ 'Arkia']

OY-RUH	A320-232	6749	ex 2-HXHU, dd 30.04.25, lsd fr/op by DAT
YR-ADA	A320-214	3218	ex VP-CXI, dd 02.05.25 & entered service same day, lsd fr/op by Flyyo

Israir Airlines [6H/ISR 'Israir']

YR-HAA	A320-216	2881	ex VQ-CAF, dd 19.04.25 & entered service same day, lsd fr/op by HelloJets

Buraq Air [UZ/BRQ 'Buraqair']

5A-BAE	A320-214	4852	ex RP-C3264, dd 14.05.25, lsd fr AFG Aviation Ireland

Cyprus Airways [CY/CYP 'Cyprus']

5B-DEF	A220-300	55344	ex C-FPDR, ff 18.03.25, dd 17.04.25, lsd fr Azorra Aviation

Air Peace [P4/APK 'Peace Bird']

YL-LDD	A320-232	3264	ex 2-VIDZ, dd 10.05.25 & entered service 13.05.25, lsd fr/op by SmartLynx

Qair

5N-SYQ	Emb-135KL	145682	ex N844AE, dd 13.05.25

AirKenya [QP/XAK 'Sunexpress']

5Y-DBA	DHC-8 202	448	ex C-FGFO, dd 02.05.25, lsd fr Avmax Aircraft Leasing

Renegade Air

5Y-RNV	ATR 42-500	637	ex 2-HAIB, dd 08.05.25, lsd fr Abelo

Air Algérie [AH/DAH 'Air Algerie']

EC-OAQ	A330-203	901	ex 2-CJIM, dd 14.05.25 & entered service 15.05.25, lsd fr/op by Plus Ultra
LZ-FSD	A320-214	3461	ex B-6607, dd 15.05.25 & entered service 17.05.25 lsd fr/op by Fly2Sky
YR-LRC	A340-313	844	ex OO-ABB, dd 18.01.25, lsd fr/op by Legend Airlines

Villa Air [VP/VQI 'Villa Air']

8Q-VAB	DHC-6 300	683	ex N683AR, reg'd 30.04.25 to Gloster Ltd (Twin Otter International)
8Q-VAC	DHC-6 300	773	ex N70AR, reg'd 30.04.25 to Twin Otter International Ltd

KM Malta Airlines [KM/KMM 'Sky Knight']

9H-SWK	A320-232	4008	ex LY-BLC, dd 11.05.25 & entered service 12.05.25, lsd fr/op by Avion Express Malta

PLAY Europe [FPE 'Gamer']

9H-PEC	A321-251nx	11345	ex TF-PLC, dd 31.05.25, lsd fr AerCap, lsd to/op for SkyUp Europe

SkyUp Europe [U5/SEU 'Sky Malta']

LY-GYM	A320-214	2584	ex 2-VIHC, dd 30.05.25, lsd fr/op by GetJet Airlines
LY-MGM	B737-8EH	34274	ex 2-BBMB, dd 01.05.25, lsd fr/op by KlasJet
9H-PEA	A321-251n	8008	ex TF-AEW, dd 09.05.25, lsd fr/op by PLAY Europe
9H-PEC	A321-251nx	11345	ex TF-PLC, dd 31.05.25, lsd fr/op by PLAY Europe

Wizz Air Malta [W4/WMT 'Wizz Malta']

LY-SEI	B737-86N	32692	ex VP-CMO, dd 27.05.25 & entered service 28.05.25, lsd fr/op by GetJet Airlines
9H-WMA	A321-271nx	12547	ex D-AZAV, ff 12.03.25, dd 02.04.25 to Wizz Air
9H-WNZ	A321-271nx	12524	ex D-AZYJ, ff 28.03..25, dd 15.04.25 to Wizz Air

Kuwait Airways [KU/KAC 'Kuwaiti']

9K-APK	A330-941	2083	ex F-WWCJ, ff 10.03.25, dd 23.04.25, named 'Warba'

Batik Air Malaysia [OD/MXD 'Malindo']

9M-LNY	B737-8GP	39871	ex PK-LDP, dd 23.05.25, lsd fr AerCap

Malaysia Airlines [MH/MAS 'Malaysian']

9M-MNI	A330-941	2088	ex F-WWCO, ff 25.03.25, dd 17.04.25 to CIT Leasing, lsd fr Avolon Aerospace

Mont Gabaon Airlines [MG]

5Y-FAH	A320-211	341	ex N341XC, dd 27.04.25 & entered service 01.05.25, lsd fr Freedom Airline Express

Scoot [TR/TGW 'Scooter']

9V-NCK	A321-271nx	12504	ex D-AYAC, ff 27.03.25, dd 17.04.25, named 'Yellow There'

We welcome any feedback on this listing

(The listing is alphabetical with reference to the registration of the country of origin. Columns indicate the registration, type, construction number and notes.)

Prime Air
N5113A

As part of a revised agreement with Amazon, Minneapolis-based Sun Country Airlines is increasing its fleet of Boeing 737-800BCF freighters. Its latest delivery is 737-83NBCF, N5113A (c/n 32611), which had previously been operated on the e-commerce giant's behalf by Atlas Air AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/DIPANKAR BHAKTA

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PILOT JULY 2025 features electrifying PPL training as its lead feature, which reveals how H55 has built Solar Impulse technology into the Bristell B23 Energic. A leading contender in the race to become the first electric aeroplane to be fully CS-23 certified for flight training, the Energic's power technology is a legacy of the great around-the-world Solar Impulse project.

The issue also features A Better Way to Fly? After years of hiring and owning aeroplanes, including classic 'group A' types, one experienced and active pilot concludes that microlights are the real answer to his and, very likely, your needs.

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660/25

The latest news from maintenance, repair and overhaul providers

By Nigel Pittaway

Jet Aviation to expand Basel facility

Jet Aviation has started the development of two new widebody aircraft hangars at its Basel facility in Switzerland, which will increase the total capacity to around 40,000m^2, including 18,000m^2 of production shops. They will feature a wooden arch, extensive natural lighting via skylights, geothermal and solar energy production, underfloor heating, a state-of-the-art exterior construction for optimal insulation, and a "mega-door" to allow for flexibility in aircraft movements and reduce door opening in extreme weather. They will also feature integrated ground support equipment storage areas, fuel tank ventilation systems, lifts for efficient flow of parts and raw materials, a flat floor for aircraft jacking and levelling, and aerial lifelines across the entire space.

Cyril Martiniere, Jet Aviation's vice-president of maintenance operations in Europe, said: "In 1967 we were pioneers, bringing business aviation to Europe. Basel was our first site and remains our global headquarters, and home to our largest maintenance, refurbishment, modification and VIP completions centre. We have grown from one hangar to six hangars, and in the past decade we have expanded the site by over 14,000m^2 to ensure that we continue to provide an effortless experience, no matter the aircraft type, or service required."

Sylvain von Hof, Jet Aviation's vice-president SCM and real estate, added: "As well as offering new options for customers, we also build our infrastructure with our team top of mind. The new hangars will provide a state-of-art working environment, enabling them the highest standards of safety and efficiency in service of a seamless employee experience."

SAS A350s land at Lufthansa Technik

Lufthansa Technik has signed a multi-year contract with SAS Scandinavian Airlines to provide base maintenance on its fleet of 31 Airbus A350s at Lufthansa Technik Malta. The facility performed an initial base maintenance layup on an SAS A350-900 in May 2024, and the new deal will see the first aircraft arrive at the facility in 2026. The agreement covers two-, four- and six-year A350 checks, which have been in service with the carrier since 2019, and adds to the existing long-standing relationship between the two companies. Lufthansa Technik currently provides SAS with a range of services, from an Aircraft Production Inspection Program (APIP) for the airline's Airbus A320neos to a Total Component Support (TCS) and engineering support (Part 21) for its entire fleet.

The MRO provider has also opened a training centre in Santa Maria da Feira, 22 miles south of Porto, in the PERM industrial park in Portugal; it has inducted the first 18 employees ahead of the opening of a larger MRO facility there in 2027. It consists of a building that is now hosting introductory events and theoretical lessons and a second building will host practical training units. It has been leased for three years and also features seminar rooms and office space with fully equipped workstations. (Photo Vincenzo Pace)

ST Engineering signs with Air Cairo

ST Engineering has signed a five-year contract with Air Cairo, covering maintenance of CFMI LEAP-1A engines on the Egyptian carrier's Airbus A320neo fleet. The MRO provider will supply quick-turn repair and Performance Restoration Shop Visit (PRSV) services at its engine MRO facility in Singapore, with the first engine expected to be inducted shortly. It achieved testing capabilities for both the LEAP-1A and LEAP-1B engine at the facility in 2024 and is currently expanding its capabilities to include PRSV and full MRO services to better support growing LEAP engine maintenance demands.

Ahmed Shanan, Air Cairo's CEO said: "This agreement underscores our commitment to operational excellence, reliability and the highest standards of safety for our growing fleet. We look forward to a long and successful partnership with ST Engineering as we continue to strengthen our fleet capabilities and enhance our service offerings in the competitive aviation market." (Photo Airbus)

FL Technics introduces A321XLR course

FL Technics has developed and introduced an aircraft maintenance engineer differences course between the Airbus A321neo and the new Pratt & Whitney-powered A321XLR. The dedicated training programme will help operators transition their technical teams to the new aircraft, with a particular focus on aircraft systems, fuel configuration and performance upgrades unique to the XLR.

Algirdas Kadaksys, deputy CEO of technical training at FL Technics, explained: "We're fully prepared to support our clients operating the Airbus 321XLR [and] our training solutions are ready to go. By keeping up with the latest aircraft developments, we're strengthening our own skills and helping our clients stay ahead, too. This way, both [ourselves] and our partners are ready and confident as the Airbus 321XLR enters service around the world." The course can be delivered either at FL Technics' facilities or on location at the customer's engineering base. (Photo Key-Robert Veitch)

A tribute to Captain John Robert Baganz (1947-2025) by Chris Sloan

VIA AUTHOR

It is with heavy hearts that *Airliner World* marks the sudden passing of Captain John Robert Baganz – Braniff Concorde pilot, longtime US Airways captain, and one of the kindest people ever to wear wings. He passed away at his home in Flower Mound, Texas, on May 27, 2025, at the age of 78.

We met just a few months earlier at a Braniff convention. That encounter sparked a shared mission: to tell the story of Braniff's brief but groundbreaking Concorde operation and the elite pilots who flew it. Over six months, John worked closely with me on a two-part tribute, published in our May and June issues, not as a personal spotlight, but as a love letter to Braniff, Concorde, and his cherished 'Concorde Brothers', of whom only one survives today. He received the published magazines just weeks before he passed, proud to share them with friends and family.

We were due to reunite for an AvGeek outing: plane spotting at DFW's Founders Plaza, Texas BBQ, and a visit to his aviation man cave. Instead, I received a call that he had passed away. I carried on with the day in his honour, bringing his spirit and his beloved Concorde with me. On my approach into DFW, our pilot gently dipped a wing. It was a quiet, perfect tribute.

John was one of just 17 Americans, and fewer than 500 pilots worldwide, certified to fly Concorde. All 17 were from Braniff International Airways, the only airline outside British Airways and Air France to operate the supersonic icon. John was both the youngest and the last Concorde pilot hired at Braniff, selected by chance for a role that would define his career.

Born in Indiana in 1947, John dreamed of becoming a pilot from the age of six. After financial hardship forced him to pause his flight training in 1970, he was eventually accepted into Braniff's first Boeing 727 contract flight engineer class. He graduated at the top of his class and was hired two days before his 30th birthday.

He rose quickly to become a check engineer and FAA designee. In 1979, he was selected for Concorde training in France. When the offer came, he was visiting his terminally ill mother. He considered turning it down until she said: "If you don't accept this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, I will die tomorrow." He went, with her blessing and the support of his beloved wife, Lindy. He flew Concorde over the 18-month period Braniff operated it in 1979-80.

John met Lindy after an engine-out incident in 1974. She was the friend of a passenger who came to his aid. They were engaged just ten days later, beginning 51 years of marriage filled with love, faith and flight. Only his love for her and their family exceeded his love of Concorde.

Though his accomplishments were extraordinary, John remained characteristically humble. "Just call me John Boy," he'd say, a nickname he wore with pride and grace. His Texas licence plate read CONCORDE, a quiet nod to the aircraft that defined his flying career. Among his most treasured mementoes was a custom model of Concorde with landing gear extended, commemorating a rare emergency ferry flight he captained after a hydraulic failure, a story now part of SST lore.

After Braniff, John flew DC-8s across Latin America until the airline's closure. He then enjoyed a 25-year career at US Airways, serving as a senior captain, check airman, FAA examiner, and delivery pilot for more than 60 Airbus A320 Family aircraft from Hamburg and Toulouse.

A proud US Army veteran, John was also a devoted husband, father, and grandfather. His dog Gracie, often featured in heartwarming social media posts, was rarely far from his side.

Captain Baganz is survived by his beloved Lindy, his four children, and seven grandchildren. He will be posthumously inducted into the Braniff International Airways Hall of Fame this autumn.

Now, John Boy is flying once more, at Mach 2, at 60,000ft, where he can see the curvature of the Earth. Final clearance granted. You've flown west.

Braniff
BI
1 A/T DISENGAGE
2 A/T DISENGAGE
VIA AUTHOR

Letters to the editor

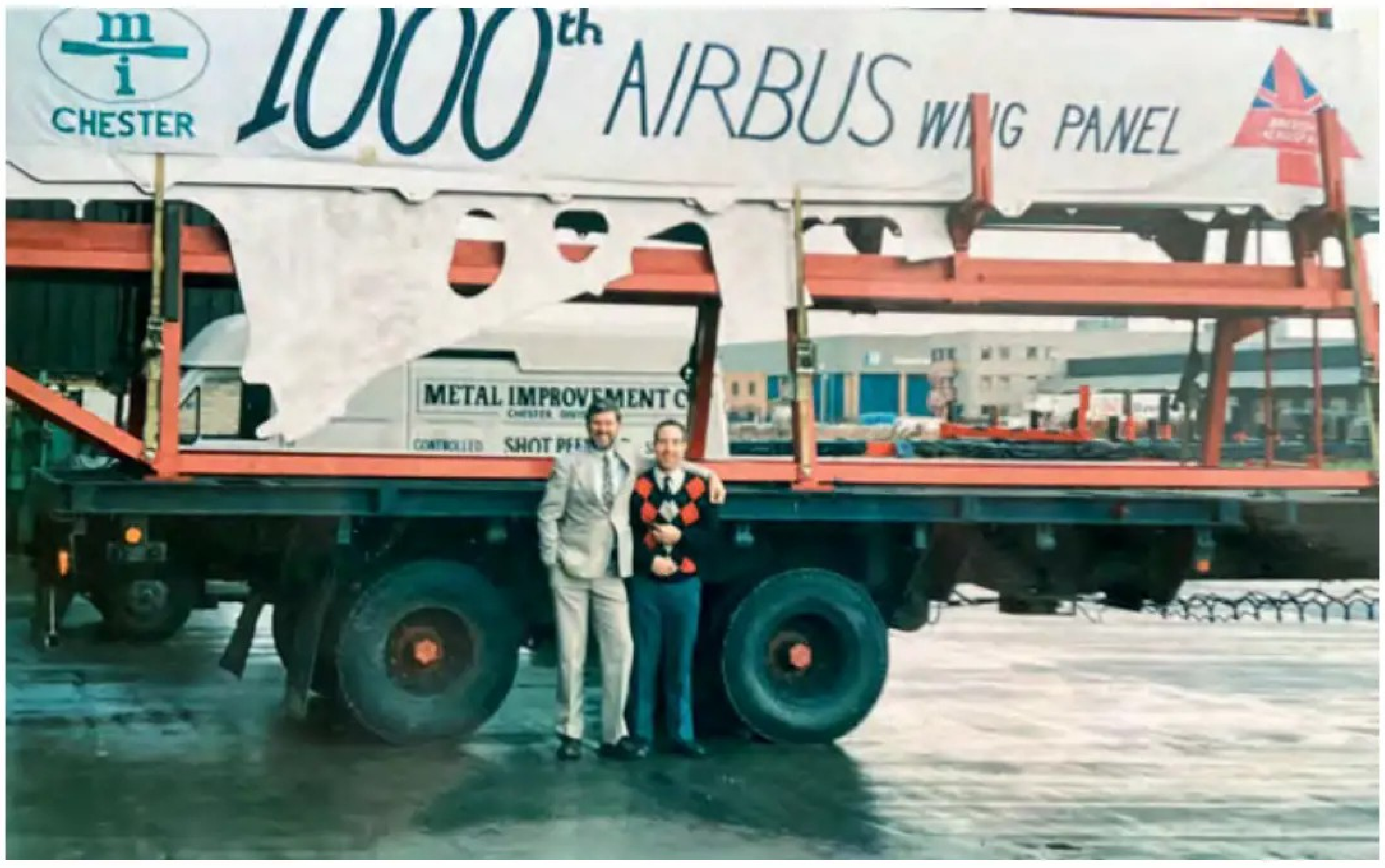
Dear Editor,
Thank you for my copy of the July edition of *Airliner World*. I could not have wished for a better one. Articles on the Comet, Concorde and Airbus are all of major interest to me.

I was a de Havilland apprentice at Broughton, Chester, working on the Comet around 1960. I was then fortunate enough to fly, with my wife, on a Dan Air Comet to Spain in 1964. On December 1, 1990, I flew with my wife again, this time for her 50th birthday, on Concorde to the Bay of Biscay, partly supersonic, and back on an experience flight. My wife and I must be among the few living people who have flown on both Comet and Concorde.

My last job was as a quality manager for an American company that was a major subcontractor to Airbus at Broughton near Chester. We put the spanwise and chordwise shapes into the aluminium wing skins for all Airbus aircraft except the A350, which has carbon fibre wing skins. One photo I have included, taken in 1985, shows our factory manager and I in front of our 1,000th wing skin to be delivered back to Airbus. Since then, many thousands have been delivered back to Airbus.

Regards,
John Evans

Ed: Thanks for the letter and for sending in these brilliant photos John. What a stroke of luck for you and your wife to have flown on the Comet and Concorde, two icons of British aviation. And then for you to come full circle and be involved in Airbus at Broughton. We're very pleased that you enjoyed the magazine.



Congratulations Craig!

Bold or bust?

Inside Russia's revamp

With its airlines hamstrung by international sanctions, Russia has responded with a multifaceted approach to keep its carriers flying, including a bold if optimistic plan to reinvigorate its ailing manufacturing sector. **Craig West** takes a closer look

"In mid-2022 staff at an undisclosed airport in Moscow discovered a part worth $40,000 being carried in a passenger's luggage; one of nearly a dozen such instances"

The *Airliner World* team send their congratulations to the magazine's former editor Craig West who recently won the award for The Best Commercial Aviation Submission at the 2025 Aerospace Media Awards. The event was held on June 15, at the Paris Air Show. Fighting off some tough competition from *Skies Magazine* and *The Smithsonian Air and Space Quarterly*, Craig's winning feature was 'Bold or Bust – Inside Russia's aviation revamp' which featured in our October 2024 issue.

CRAIG WEST
The 2025
The Best Commercial Aviation Submission
Craig West

GET IN TOUCH WITH AIRLINER WORLD

Do you have a historical tale, burning question, or comment about the magazine to share with our global audience? Get in touch via airlinerworld@keypublishing.com with the subject 'Letters to the Editor', or drop us a message on Facebook.com/AirlinerWorld, on Twitter @_AirlinerWorld or join the debate on our Key.Aero forum. As we return to the editorial office, we are also able to welcome letters once again – the postal address is: *Airliner World*, PO Box 100, Stamford, Lincolnshire, PE9 1XQ

UK *Visitors*

We present a selection of images of visiting aircraft from airports around the UK. For the most part, they're commercial jets, but almost all of them are unusual types, wearing new or unique liveries, or first visits by an airline or airliner to a particular airport. If you see something out of the ordinary while on your travels, please send in your pictures. Photos can be emailed to **airlinerworld@keypublishing.com** Please ensure you provide full details with the images, particularly the date, location, airline name and aircraft identity

Bristol

After previously being operated by SWISS and Helvetic Airways, Edelweiss Air took over the twice-weekly Zurich to Bristol service on June 2. The inaugural flight was operated by Airbus A320-214, HB-JJN (c/n 4187), which started its life with the former Swiss charter carrier Belair in 2010 GARY MORRIS

Exeter

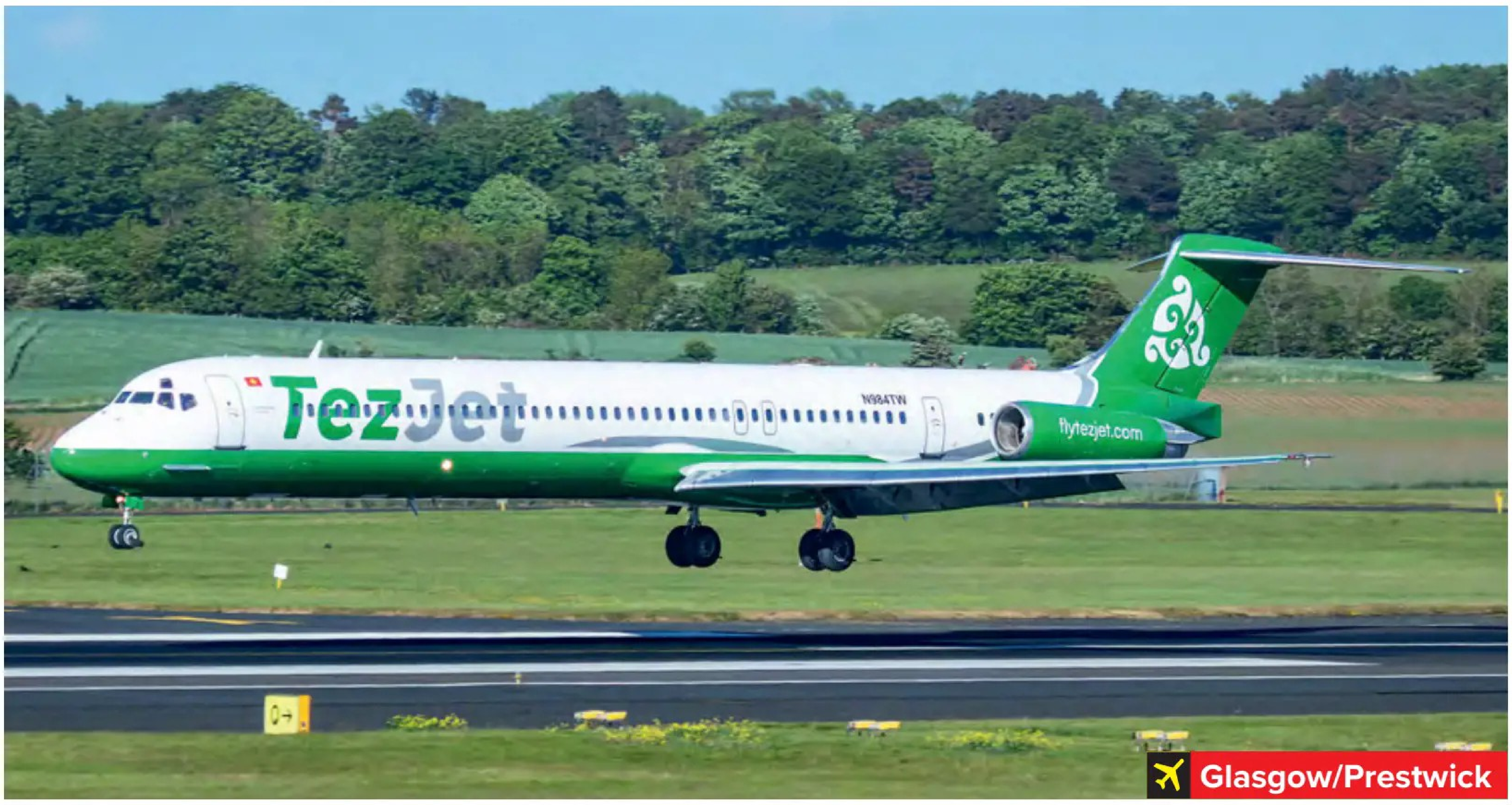
Belonging to Jetstream Aviation Capital, ATR 72-600, N1116J (c/n 1116), is seen being towed from the northside storage area at Exeter Airport in Devon to Apron 22 at Exeter Aerospace on June 4. The aircraft still wears the livery of its former operator, Voepass Linhas Aéreas, and had arrived at Exeter from Brazil via the Azores and Porto IAN SIMPSON

Glasgow/Prestwick

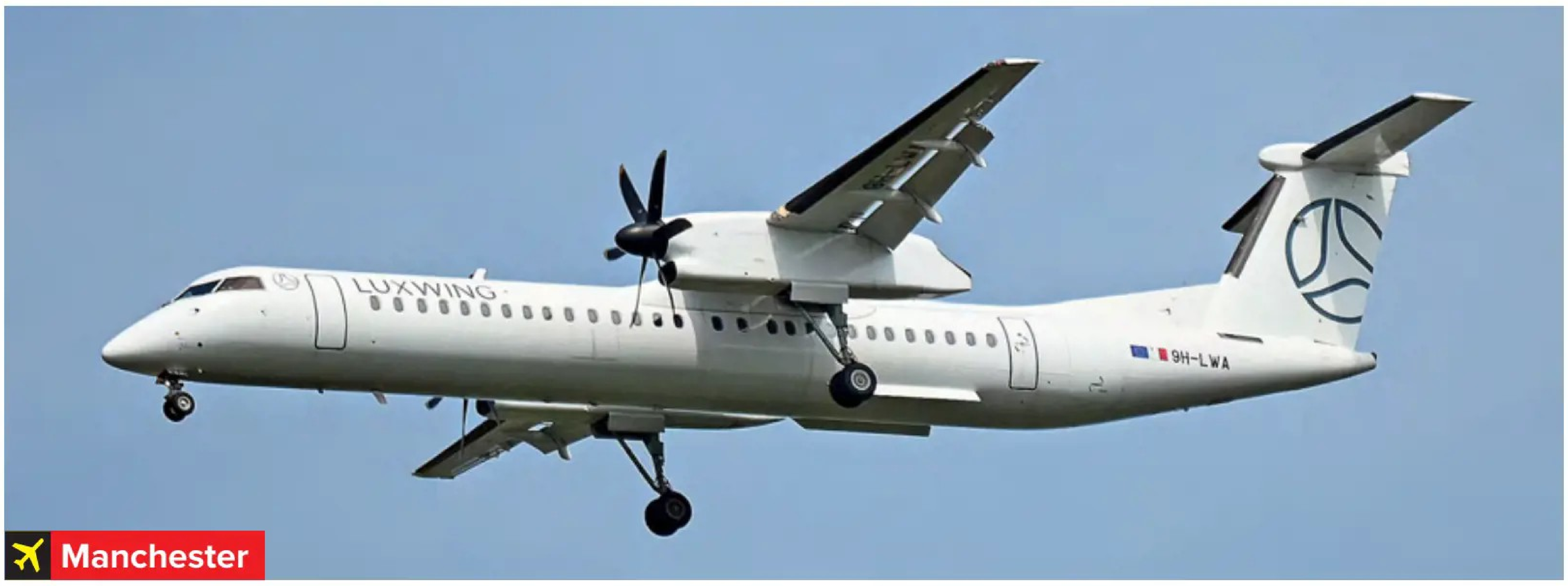
Boeing 777F, B-223S (c/n 67834), belonging to Air China Cargo is captured on its inaugural visit to Glasgow/Prestwick on June 2. The airline has recently launched a new thrice-weekly service between Beijing and the Scottish facility SH

East Midlands

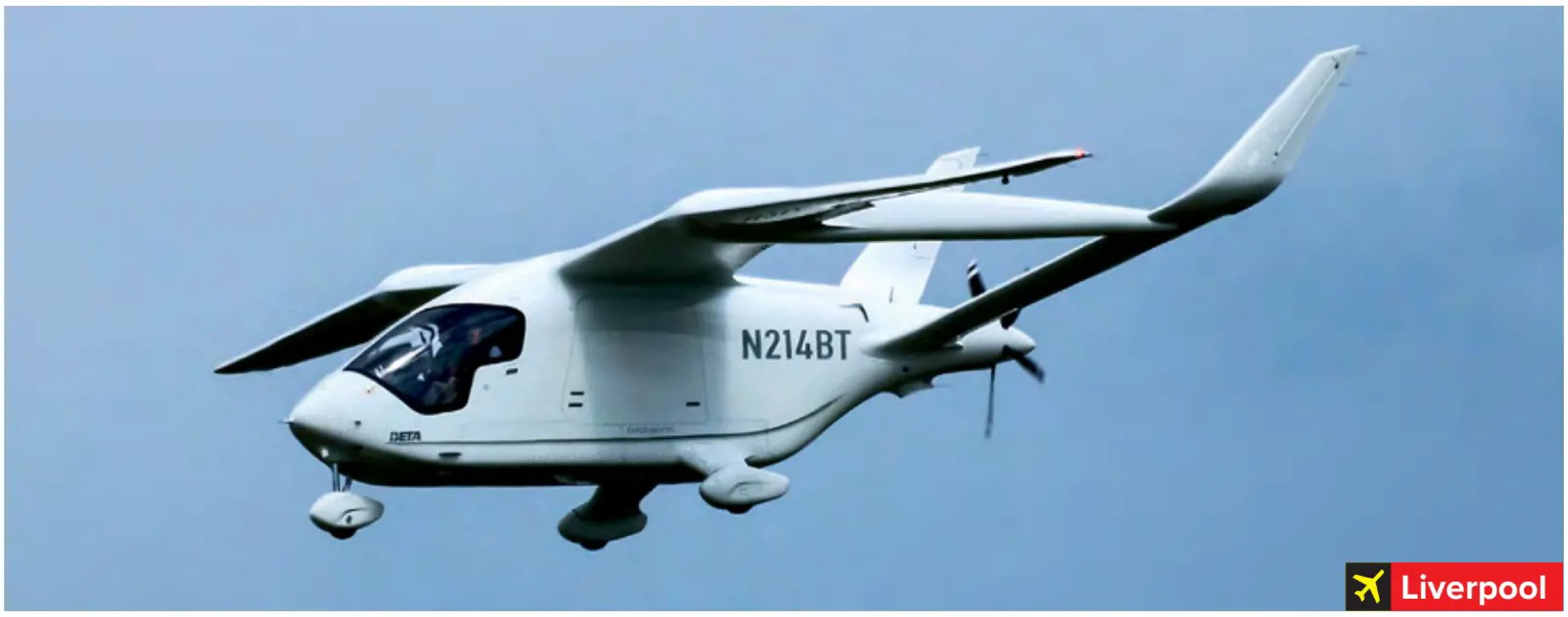
After being stripped of the bright red colour scheme of its owner, PLAY, this Airbus A321neo, 9H-PEB (c/n 7939), was seen departing East Midlands bound for Katowice, Poland. The seven-year-old aircraft, which started life with Mexico's Interjet, is one of three PLAY A321s being leased to SkyUp Airlines MATTHEW COCKRELL



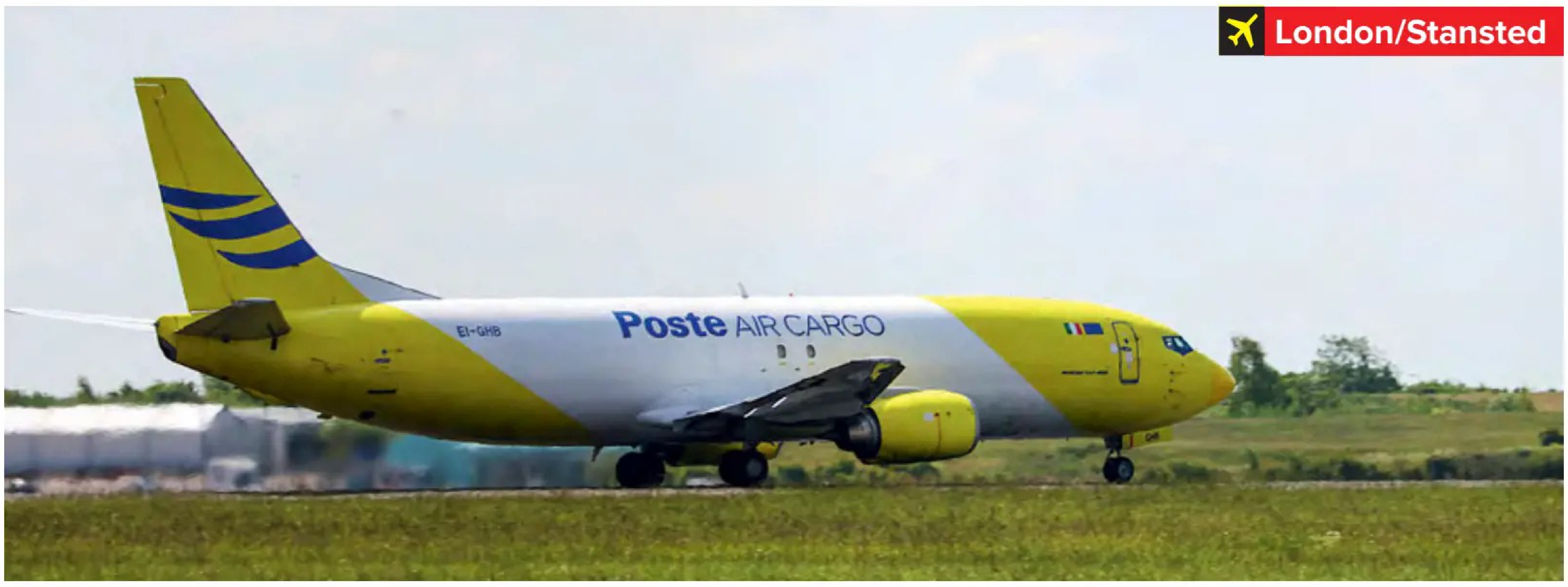
This former TWA and American Airlines McDonnell Douglas MD-83 was the last of its type to be produced in December 1999. The aircraft had been stored in Roswell, New Mexico, for five-and-a-half years and is pictured landing at Glasgow/Prestwick while on delivery to TezJet Airlines of Kyrgyzstan. Although the aircraft still wore its original registration number, N984TW (c/n 53634), it is expected to be re-registered EX-80017 once it enters service SH



This Bombardier DHC-8-402Q Dash 8, 9H-LWA (c/n 4088), belongs to the Maltese charter carrier Luxwing and was operating a charter flight from Bari to Manchester and then on to Avignon. However, this aircraft is no stranger to the Northwest hub, after entering service with Flybe in March 2004 and remaining with the airline until its collapse in March 2020 NIK FRENCH



A very unusual visitor at Liverpool/John Lennon Airport was this fully-electric Beta Technologies CX300, N214BT (c/n BT31C-0002). The aircraft had arrived in Ireland by sea and was transported from the ship to Shannon Airport as an underslung load by a UH-1. After a week of test flights, it flew up to Weston Airport, just outside Dublin, before hopping across the Irish Sea to Liverpool JOHN SPENCER



Seen departing on Runway 22 at London/Stansted is this 26-year-old Boeing 737-490SF, EI-GHB (c/n 28896), of Poste Air Cargo. The jet had arrived from Rome and was caught leaving for Shannon, returning on the same route a few days later DUNCAN DELLOW

FTEJerez to open UK training base

Spanish flight training provider FTEJerez is to open a new UK base at London Oxford Airport, with contracts signed during June and operations scheduled to start in late summer 2025.

This expansion marks a significant milestone in the school's history, re-establishing a physical presence in the UK for the first time in more than three decades. The move follows the recent approval to begin construction on bespoke facilities designed specifically for FTE's operations. The new base will initially feature two additional Diamond DA42 aircraft and will offer an in-house training solution tailored to UK CAA licensing requirements.

FTEJerez is an official training provider for British Airways and Jet2.com, and this new base will further strengthen its ability to support its UK airline cadets and self-sponsored students pursuing a UK or dual licence. FTE said the site has been selected with scalability in mind, allowing for future expansion should demand increase.

Oscar Sordo, the company's CEO, said: "This is a proud and exciting step forward for FTEJerez. Our roots lie in the UK, with the BAE Systems Flying College in Prestwick, founded in 1988, and this marks the first time since then that we return with an official base. Establishing our own presence at London Oxford Airport allows us to deliver UK CAA training with the same quality and oversight that have defined our programmes for decades." (Photo FTEJerez)

Talent crunch looms for global aviation

An estimated 1.5 million civil aviation professionals will be needed worldwide by 2034, according to CAE's biennial Aviation Talent Forecast. The forecast analyses the need for pilots, aircraft maintenance technicians, cabin crew and, for the first time, air traffic controllers, predicting that 71,000 controllers will be needed globally over the next ten years.

The 2025 CAE Aviation Talent Forecast reports that 1,292,000 commercial aviation professionals will be required – 267,000 of them pilots, 347,000 aviation maintenance technicians and 678,000 as cabin crew – with the largest percentage needed to meet rapidly rising demand in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition, 102,000 business aviation professionals are expected to be required worldwide over the next ten years – 33,000 of them pilots and 69,000 aircraft maintenance technicians.

Marie-Christine Cloutier, vice-president of strategy, performance, air traffic services and marketing at CAE, said: "The need for 1.5 million new aviation professionals by 2034 is being driven by record demand for air travel and a significant wave of retirements that is expected across all categories. With commercial and business aviation fleets expected to see double-digit increases over the next ten years, the industry must take action to attract, train and retain personnel. Highly skilled aviation professionals are not just a necessity for the safety of the air transport system, they are the foundation for the successful expansion and resilience of the global aviation sector."

EASA green lights mixed reality simulator

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) has, for the first time, certified a flight simulator using mixed reality technology for use in civilian pilot training. The approval means that flight hours logged in the device can now count towards pilot licensing, marking a significant shift in how immersive technologies are viewed by aviation regulators.

The simulator, known as the NOVASIM MR DA42, has been developed by Swiss firm Brunner and replicates the widely used Diamond DA42 aircraft. It has been deployed by Lufthansa Aviation Training, which supported the qualification process. The device is classified as a Flight and Navigation Procedures Trainer II (FNPT II).

Unlike conventional fixed-base simulators, the NOVASIM system combines physical controls with a mixed reality headset, allowing pilots to operate real hardware while viewing a photorealistic virtual cockpit. The setup also includes integrated eye-tracking, giving instructors the ability to monitor where a trainee is looking.

EASA's qualification was granted under special conditions, acknowledging that the device meets the required standards despite using an unconventional visual system. It is the first time extended or mixed reality has been accepted as part of an approved training regime in Europe. (Photo Varjo)

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661/25

Batik Air 737's close call on inaugural flight

ABOVE: ***PK-LDK was delivered to Batik Air on April 20, 2020, after previously being operated by fellow Lion Air Group airline Malindo Air (now rebranded Batik Air Malaysia)*** AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/ SIERRA BRAVO

A Batik Air Boeing 737 came within 924ft of impacting terrain during an approach to Canberra after the crew descended below the minimum safe altitude (MSA), a report by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) has found.

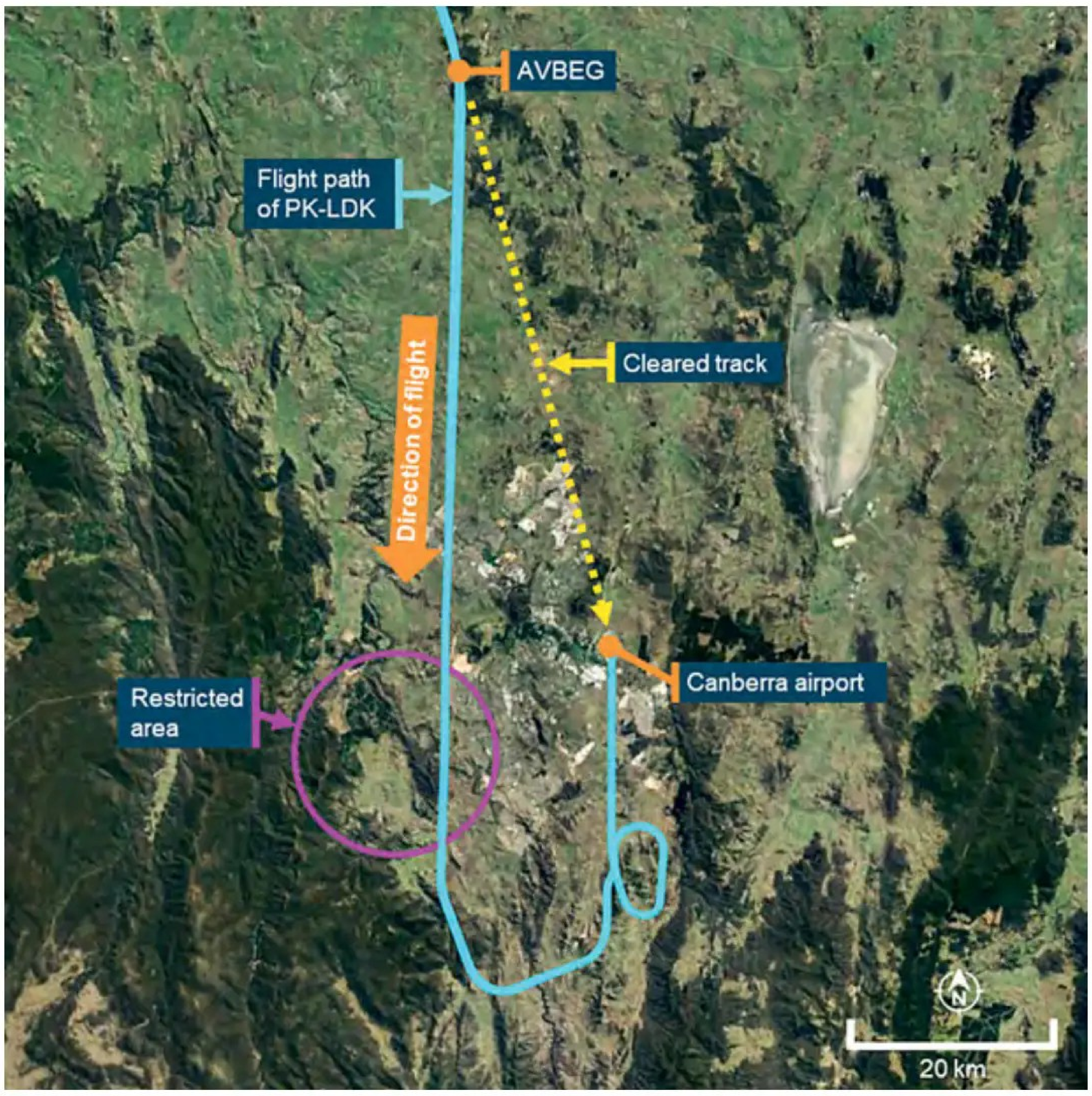
The flight

The 737-8GP, PK-LDK (c/n 39875), was operating the airline's inaugural service between Denpasar International Airport and the Australian capital on the evening of June 13, 2024. While en route, the flight crew noticed that the estimated time of arrival was prior to the 0600hrs opening time for the airport's air traffic control (ATC) approach and tower services. The crew elected to proceed without delay and prepared for arrival without ATC services, using the gateway's common traffic advisory frequency (CTAF).

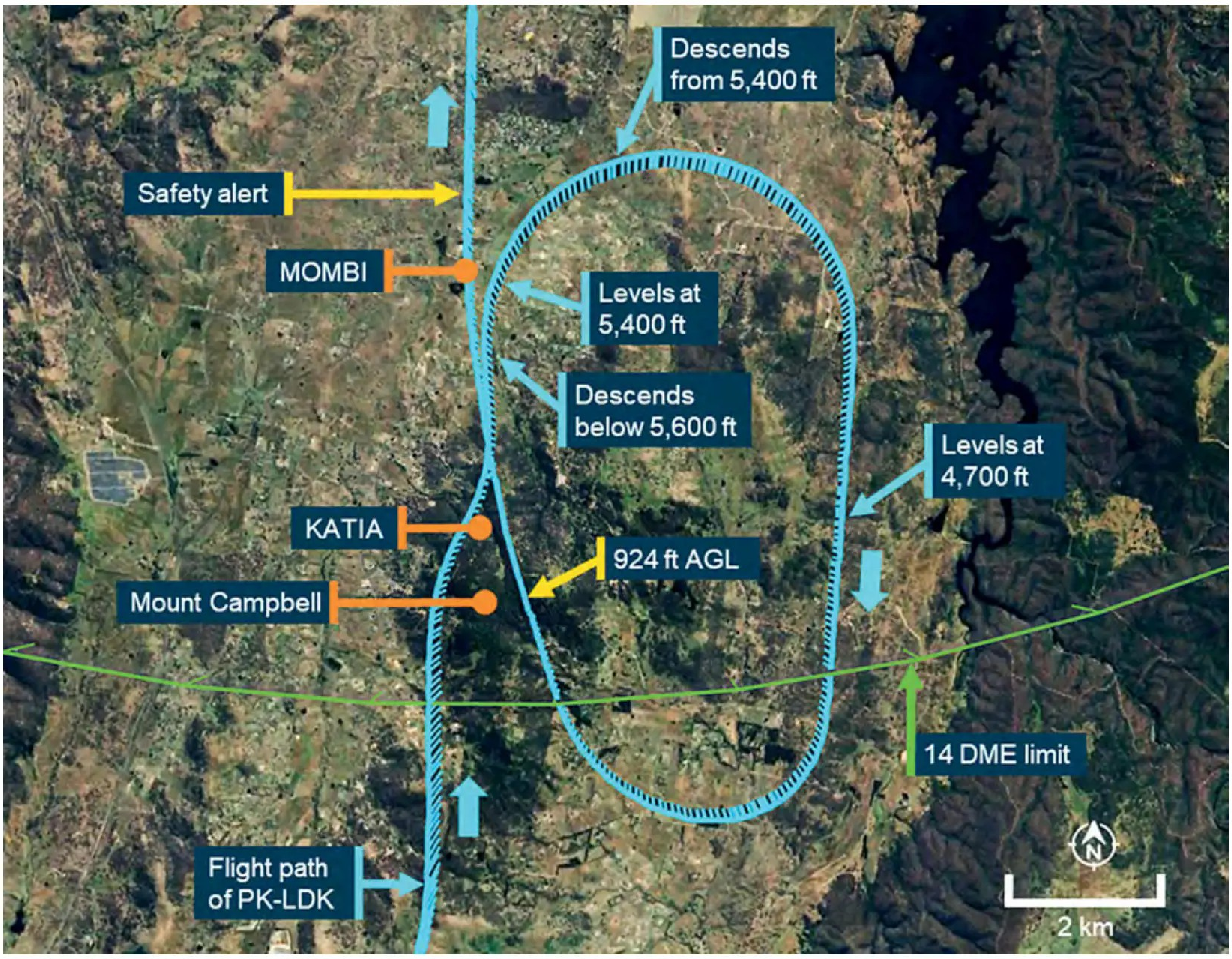
As the aircraft was descending towards uncontrolled airspace and tracking direct to Canberra along the flight path cleared by en-route ATC, the crew deviated from the cleared track by commencing the AVBEG 5A standard arrival route (STAR). The duty air traffic controller intervened and provided altitude instructions to maintain separation from an en-route restricted area. This intervention resulted in the aircraft becoming higher than the desired descent profile and the crew decided to use the holding pattern at the approach waypoint of MOMBI to reduce altitude. While flying the holding pattern at MOMBI, the aircraft was descended to 4,700ft above mean sea level (AMSL), significantly below the holding pattern MSA of 5,600ft AMSL. The aircraft's recorded radio height subsequently reduced to a minimum of 924ft above ground level (AGL) before the approach was recommenced from 4,700ft AMSL, below the 5,400ft AMSL MSA for that segment of the approach.

The approach was conducted in clear night conditions. On the morning of June 14, 2024, first light was at 0641hrs, 39 minutes after the aircraft landed. The moon was also below the horizon.

The Canberra Approach controller who took over management of the airspace while the aircraft was in the holding pattern identified that the aircraft was operating below the MSA, contacted the crew to



RIGHT: ***The flight path of PK-LDK after leaving the AVBEG waypoint*** ATSB/ GOOGLE EARTH



LEFT: ***A detailed view of the flight path during the hold at MOMBI, during which the descent below the MSA occurred***
ATSB/GOOGLE EARTH

provide a safety alert and advised the crew to contact Canberra Tower. The approach continued using controlled airspace procedures and the aircraft landed shortly after without further incident.

Investigation

The ATSB found that the MOMBI holding pattern "was not correctly flown by the crew and resulted in the aircraft descending significantly below the minimum safe altitude". Investigators also found that the Canberra CTAF had not been selected by the pilots, and appropriate broadcasts were not made. "This prevented the crew from receiving the oncoming Canberra tower controller's safety alerts, being able to illuminate the runway lights and increased the risk of conflict with other traffic," the report said.

Prior to starting the approach, when the crew deviated from the cleared track to Canberra by commencing the AVBEG 5A STAR, the air traffic controller did not advise them of the deviation or provide a safety alert. Instead, the controller provided instructions that contributed to the crew becoming confused regarding the airspace classification for the arrival and approach, the ATSB said.

The Melbourne Centre controller providing the flight information service for the aircraft was not, and was not required to be, aware of the holding pattern minimum altitudes. Therefore, the controller did not issue a safety alert when the aircraft descended below the minimum safe altitude.

The ATSB also found that Batik Air's change management processes were not effective at fully identifying and mitigating the risks associated with the commencement of the Denpasar to Canberra route. Batik Air also did not ensure that the crew had completed all CTAF training prior to them operating flights into Australia where the use of these procedures could be required.

As a result of this incident, Batik Air has implemented several safety actions including revising its briefing document for Canberra Airport to include detailed information on the ATC hours, CTAF procedures, holding requirements and guidance for adherence to lowest safe altitude requirements. The ATSB said the airline is also completing practical and theoretical CTAF training for all flight crew assigned to Australian operations. It has also adjusted its flight schedule for the Denpasar-Canberra route so that early arrivals occur during ATC operating hours.

Concluding with a safety message, the ATSB said: "This incident underlines the need for operators to ensure that they have comprehensive and effective change management processes in place to identify all foreseeable risks relevant to a new route and implement appropriate mitigations to ensure the safe operation of these routes. In this case, the unfamiliar operating environment included the potential for operations using a CTAF, an uncommon operating procedure for non-Australian operators and crews. Comprehensive and regular crew training is vital in ensuring that crews can effectively manage the risks inherent in the use of unusual procedures." AW

DATE	REG'N	C/N	TYPE	OPERATOR	FATALITIES	LOCATION	NOTES
May 2	XA-UJF	208B1300	Cessna 208B Grand Caravan	Aéreo Servicio Guerrero	0	Mexico	Conducted forced landing in hilly terrain about 20 mins after take-off from Guerrero Negro Airport
May 6	N142SA	241	de Havilland Canada DHC-6 Twin Otter 300	Grand Canyon Scenic Airlines	0	USA	Encountered turbulence and hail en route resulting in "substantial damage" to aircraft
May 16	HP-1899PST	20306	Fokker 50	Air Panama	0	Panama	Destroyed when it veered off runway 27 after landing at Bocas Del Toro Airport
June 5	5Y-SXI	208B5482	Cessna 208B Grand Caravan EX	Scenic Air Safaris	0	Kenya	Crashed on take-off from Retiti Airstrip in Kenya
June 10	9V-OFI	37125	Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner	Scoot	0	Pacific Ocean	Encountered turbulence en route between Singapore/Changi and Guangzhou/Baiyun. At least one occupant sustained serious injuries
June 11	N221LM	SH3722	Shorts 360-300	Transair	0	USA	Conducted gear-up landing on runway 04R at Honolulu/Daniel K Inouye International
June 12	VT-ANB	36279	Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner	Air India	241+38	India	Crashed less than a mile after take-off from Ahmedabad/Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport. One passenger survived
June 14	N969WN	41777	Boeing 737-7H4	Southwest Airlines	0	USA	Encountered turbulence during flight, severely injuring one passenger
June 15	N28478	31649	Boeing 737-924ER	United Airlines	0	USA	Encountered turbulence during flight, severely injuring one cabin crew member

ON THE WINGS OF ATHENA

Creating a financially successful flag carrier has long been an issue for Greece. However, despite decades of economic challenges and external pressures, AEGEAN has grown into one of Europe's leading airlines. **Lee Cross** went to Athens to find out more

aegeanair.com
SX-NEJ

In May 2024, AEGEAN celebrated its 25th anniversary. The company has come a long way from its initial operations with two Avro RJ100s hopping between Athens, Heraklion and Thessaloniki.

Indeed, during its 25 years of operations, AEGEAN has been one of the most consistently profitable airlines in Europe, despite facing numerous challenges along the way, including the near decade-long Greek economic crisis.

"There's no big secret to our success," Yiannis Rasoglou, AEGEAN's network planning and airline partnerships director, explained in an exclusive interview with *Airliner World* at the carrier's headquarters in Athens. "It's a combination of the careful steps we have taken over the years in terms of our expansion with consistent focus on KPIs, passenger experience, as well as the internal culture of the airline where we co-operate in an efficient manner. Through this, we manage to be more effective in everything we do and more adaptable to any changes."

This success continued in 2024, with strong results in both passenger numbers and profits. In total, the airline carried 16.3 million passengers, representing a 6% increase over the previous year, driven by strong demand from both inbound and outbound tourism, with an average load factor of 82.5%.

Full-year earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation (EBITDA) reached €405.3m, with a net profit of €129.9m. These financial results were the second highest in the airline's history in terms of earnings after tax, despite the "significant restrictions and challenges faced" the airline said.

Moving into the first quarter of 2025, AEGEAN has continued this upward trend, delivering EBITDA of €43.8m, up from €33.2m a year ago. This was aided by an 8% increase in passenger numbers to 3.1 million. Meanwhile, international traffic increased by approximately 12%, with average load factors across both international and domestic flights at around 80.6%.

Solving seasonality

These numbers have been assisted in part by the gradual extension of

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BELOW: ***AEGEAN Airbus A320neo, SX-NEJ (c/n 11384) blasts out of its Athens base***
AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/ ANGELO HARMSWORTH

Self-made Greek entrepreneur Theodoros Vassilakis purchased Aegean Aviation in 1994 and set about creating an airline to rival the flag carrier Olympic Airways ALL IMAGES AEGEAN AIRLINES UNLESS STATED

the tourist season in Athens and Thessaloniki, two of the airline's biggest markets and those with the most consistent demand. Tourism is a key economic driver in Greece, accounting for more than a quarter of the country's economic output; however, it has suffered from seasonal fluctuations for years.

For some time, AEGEAN has attempted to mitigate this seasonality through a targeted investment plan. This has seen the airline extend its summer season by offering further flights outside the peak July and August months by adding more year-round routes and extending the duration of its existing seasonal services. Indeed, for the 2024/25 winter season, the airline added 18 new routes to 14 countries compared to the previous winter.

The plan is supported by AEGEAN's flexible fleet and network management, which enables the carrier to adapt to changes in market conditions and optimise its route network based on demand. This year, the carrier is increasing frequencies on key routes, such as Athens to Cairo, Lisbon, Zurich and extending year-round services to Zagreb, while continuing to promote winter tourism to Greece. It is also expanding its presence in Cyprus, with a new direct service to Rome/Fiumicino, which commenced on April 15. The thrice-weekly link has already recorded strong load factors, with the airline hoping to maintain the route into the winter season. In terms of its Cypriot operation, AEGEAN has planned a 22% increase in capacity for 2025, with a total of 1.4 million seats to and from the island.

However, what the airline hasn't been able to avoid is the impact on its operation and, thus, its finances from ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, which have led to the airline suspending services to Amman, Beirut and Tel Aviv. Indeed, the suspension of these routes has led the carrier to cut its international traffic by around 4%. As *Airliner World* went to press, AEGEAN had also been forced to temporarily suspend its twice-weekly service to Erbil International

> "The opening of these facilities was a significant investment, not just for AEGEAN, but for the country too, placing Greece on the aviation map in this field"

BELOW: ***The airline's last Boeing 737, SX-BLM (c/n 24813), left the company on June 2, 2011*** KEY-TONY DIXON

AEGEAN
www.aegeanair.com
Ethos

The airline made the switch to Airbus in February 2007, with the arrival of its first A320, SX-DVG (c/n 3033) Ethos, *pictured here on approach to Corfu*
AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/MARKUS MANIKA

> **“There’s no big secret to our success. It’s a combination of the careful steps we have taken over the years in terms of our expansion with consistent focus on KPIs , passenger experience as well as the internal culture of the airline where we co-operate quite efficiently”**

Airport, Iraq, which it had launched in February this year.

Fleet focus

During the carrier’s formative years, it boasted a fleet of Avro RJ100s and Boeing 737s. It made the switch to Airbus when it welcomed its first A320-232, SX-DVG (c/n 3033) *Ethos*, in February 2007, the first airframe from the airline’s first-ever order for brand-new aircraft, placed in December 2005 for eight A320s with options on a further 12. Additional orders were placed, including for the larger Airbus A321, which led to the gradual retirement of its Boeing 737 fleet; the last example, SX-BLM (c/n 24813), left the company on June 2, 2011.

From this point, AEGEAN became an all-Airbus operator, and in March 2018, it inked a deal for its largest aircraft order to date, a €5bn agreement for 20 A320neos and ten A321neos, creating one of the youngest fleets in Europe.

The first airframe from this order, SX-NEO (c/n 9400), proudly carrying the carrier’s new livery and refreshed onboard product, created by London-based design firm PriestmanGoode, entered service on February 14, between Athens and Munich.

This year, AEGEAN is set to receive six new aircraft: three A321neos, two A320neos, and a single ATR 72-600, which will be operated by its subsidiary, Olympic Air.

These new additions form part of the carrier’s commitment to its fleet investment, further enhanced in March of this year when it signed a deal for an additional eight A321neos. This increased the total number of A320neo Family aircraft ordered to 58, comprising 21 A320neos, 33 A321neos, and four A321LRs. Thirty-four of these have already been delivered. Speaking at the time, the airline’s CEO Dimitris Gerogiannis said that the new Airbus order was “essential” to achieving AEGEAN’s “growth objectives” and enhancing its competitiveness.

“We want to invest more in the A320neo side,” Rasoglou explained. “It’s a very efficient aircraft, in terms of its operations and also provides all the sustainability benefits we require.”

No details have been released

»

BELOW: ***AEGEAN’s first Airbus A320neo, SX-NEO (c/n 9400), was unveiled at a special ceremony at the carrier’s Athens hub in February 2020***

AEGEAN
aegeanair.com
SX-NEO
A320neo

AEGEAN
A321neo
aegeanair.com
SX-NAC

> “We want to invest more in the A320neo side. It’s a very efficient aircraft, in terms of its operations and also provides all the sustainability benefits we require”

ABOVE: ***Airbus A321neo SX-NAC (c/n 10189) was delivered to the airline in December 2020*** VINCENZO PACE

AEGEAN
blue

LEFT: ***The aircraft’s arrival coincided with the introduction of a new livery and refreshed cabin and onboard offering created by London-based PriestmanGoode***

regarding the delivery timeline for the recent order. The airline’s current roster of A320neo Family jets is powered by Pratt & Whitney PW1100G GTF engines.

P&W problems

However, these GTF engines have been causing AEGEAN, like countless other operators worldwide, issues owing to the mandatory early inspections of the power plants. Rasoglou explained that the groundings had been and remain “a very big challenge” for the airline.

During the second half of 2024, AEGEAN was forced to ground around eight A320/A321neos; approximately 17% of its active jet fleet. This, they said “restricted capacity growth, particularly during the peak season, reduced the cost benefits from their use and created the need for additional leases” which included two A320s from Cyprus Airways.

“It’s affected various aspects of our operation,” Rasoglou added. “Network planning, maintenance schedules; everything. And it has definitely affected our forward plans and, of course, our performance as the aircraft was meant to provide us with much more efficiency.”

Rasoglou stated that the airline anticipates the GTF issues will persist until the end of 2027. This year, AEGEAN expects to ground between nine and eleven aircraft, increasing even up to 14 during 2026, although it does not plan to wet-lease any additional airframes due to the high costs involved. Despite these problems, Rasoglou said that the airline had “learnt some lessons” from the groundings and “how better to manage the situation”.

Long-range lover

Engine issues aside, AEGEAN is now looking forward to the arrival of its four brand-new Airbus A321LRs, the first

BELOW: ***This year, AEGEAN expects to ground between nine and ten aircraft, increasing to 13 or 14 during 2026 due to ongoing issues with its Pratt & Whitney GTF engines***

Olympic Air

Olympic Air was formed out of the ashes of Greece's former flag carrier, Olympic Airways. Following years of financial difficulties, the state-owned carrier was restructured, with its subsidiary Macedonian Airlines, taking over Olympic's operations and rebranding as Olympic Airlines.

In 2004, the Greek government attempted to sell the troubled carrier, with AEGEAN among the interested parties. No buyer was found, and in late 2008 details emerged of a plan to restructure and temporarily relaunch the airline as Pantheon Airways before the rebranding as Olympic.

A year later, the airline was acquired by Marfin Investment Group (MIG), the largest investment fund in Greece, and on September 29, it was rebranded as Olympic Air. An order was placed for eight De Havilland Canada Dash 8-400s at the 2009 Paris Air Show.

In February 2010, it was announced that Olympic and AEGEAN were to merge, with the Olympic brand surviving. However, the merger was later blocked by the European Commission due to anti-competition concerns.

On October 21, 2012, AEGEAN announced that it would purchase Olympic for €75m. As part of the deal and to win EC approval, both airlines would continue to operate as separate brands. The agreement was approved, and on October 9, 2013, Olympic became a subsidiary of AEGEAN. (Photo AEGEAN)

SX-OBI
OLYMPIC

of which is scheduled to join the fleet in the first quarter of 2027. This will be followed by a second before the end of June of that year, with the third set to arrive by the end of 2027. The fourth is scheduled for delivery in early 2028.

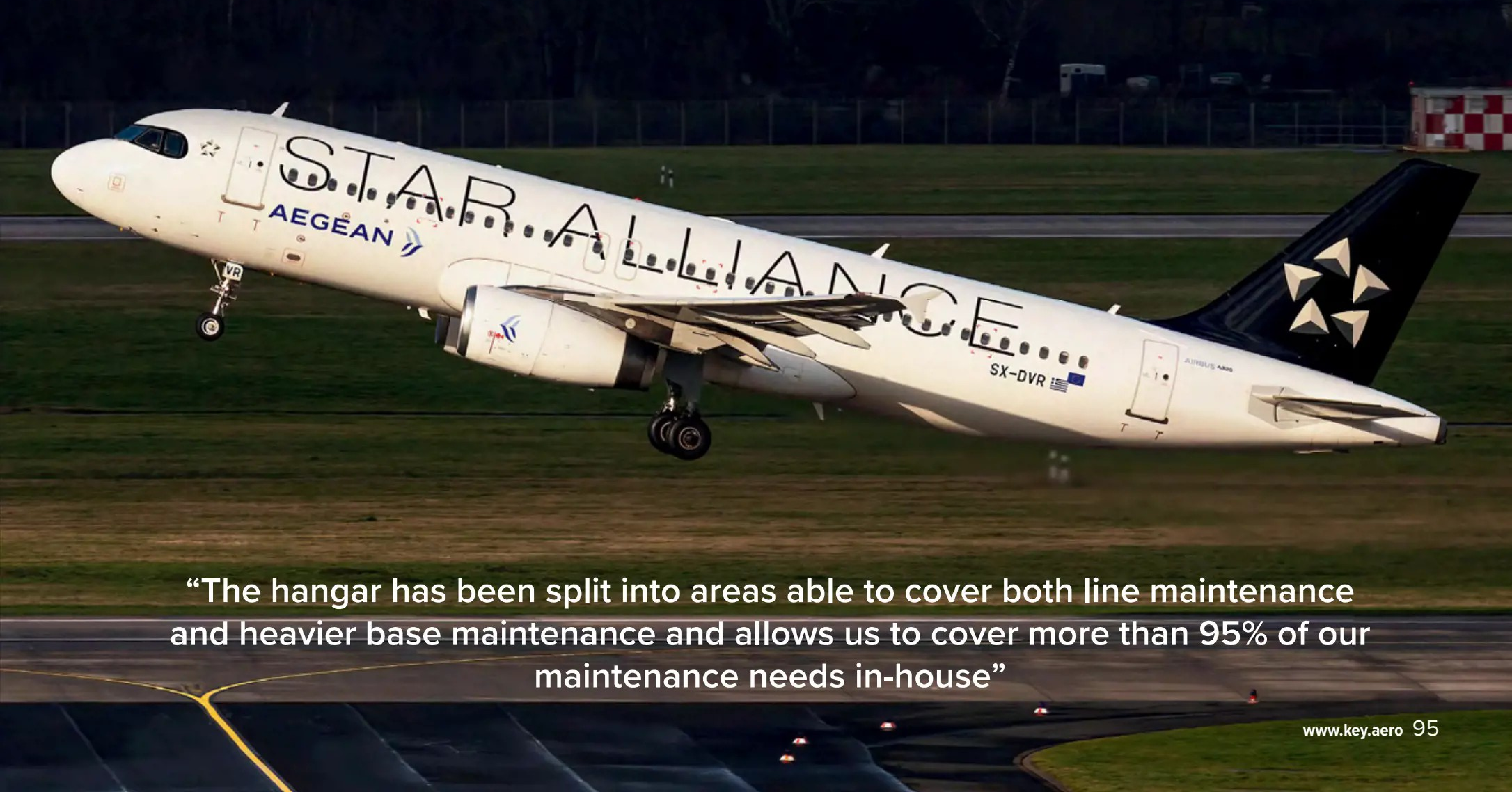
"The new long-range aircraft will assist us in reaching new markets," Rasoglou said. "Looking east, we are considering the case of India, such as New Delhi or Mumbai. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan could be potential destinations, as well as markets in Africa such as Ethiopia and Kenya.

"But we will also put the aircraft to work on routes to the Middle East, such as UAE and Saudi Arabia. Here, there is a different need as we are competing with a very enhanced product from the region's airlines, compared to European standards."

So, what about the new onboard product for the incoming A321LR sub-fleet? Rasoglou remained tight-lipped about the exact details but said that lie-flat beds will be installed in business class, and the entire aircraft, from the business to the economy sections, will offer an "enhanced" product for its passengers.

AEGEAN's current A321 fleet is configured with 220 seats. The new additions will feature less than 180, although the exact breakdown of business and economy class seats has yet to be revealed. In addition to the lie-flat seats, the airline has also announced that satellite connectivity and personal in-flight entertainment (IFE) screens will be installed throughout the cabin.

Of course, with the addition of the LR comes the question of AEGEAN adding the A321XLR or even wide-bodied Airbus jets, a question raised after the author spotted a mock-up »



BELOW: ***AEGEAN officially joined the Star Alliance on June 30, 2010*** AIRTEAMIMAGES.COM/ PAUL BUCHROEDER

> "The hangar has been split into areas able to cover both line maintenance and heavier base maintenance and allows us to cover more than 95% of our maintenance needs in-house"

of an Aegean liveried Airbus A350. Rasoglou was quick to play down any speculation: "At the moment, the focus is completely on our narrowbody fleet. From a network perspective, both aircraft types [the LR and XLR] offer additional route choices for us. This is due, in part, to the geographical location of our Athens base, which means we are able to fly north, south, east and west to the destinations we want to serve quite comfortably."

Network gains

In addition to expanding its route portfolio using its own metal, the Star Alliance member also boasts an extensive network through its numerous codeshare and interline partners. "At the moment, we have 23 codeshare partners and close to 50 interline agreements," Rasoglou enthused. "After the COVID-19 pandemic, we launched several new partnerships in a very short period with Emirates, Volotea, Saudia, Eurowings and Juneyao. This is a crucial part of our approach and strategy, and we believe that having these agreements is very important. We have partnerships with both full-service and low-cost carriers, ensuring that there's always the right partner in the right market available for us and our customers. We intend to build on this, whether that is in markets in which we intend to expand, or in existing ones."

The codeshare agreement with Volotea, originally signed in 2021 and covering over 100 routes across France, Italy, Spain, and Greece, has now evolved into a financial investment. In September last year, AEGEAN invested €25m for a 13% stake in the Spanish low-cost carrier.

ABOVE: ***AEGEAN Technics' impressive new €140m aircraft maintenance service centre is located at the former Olympic Aviation hangar***

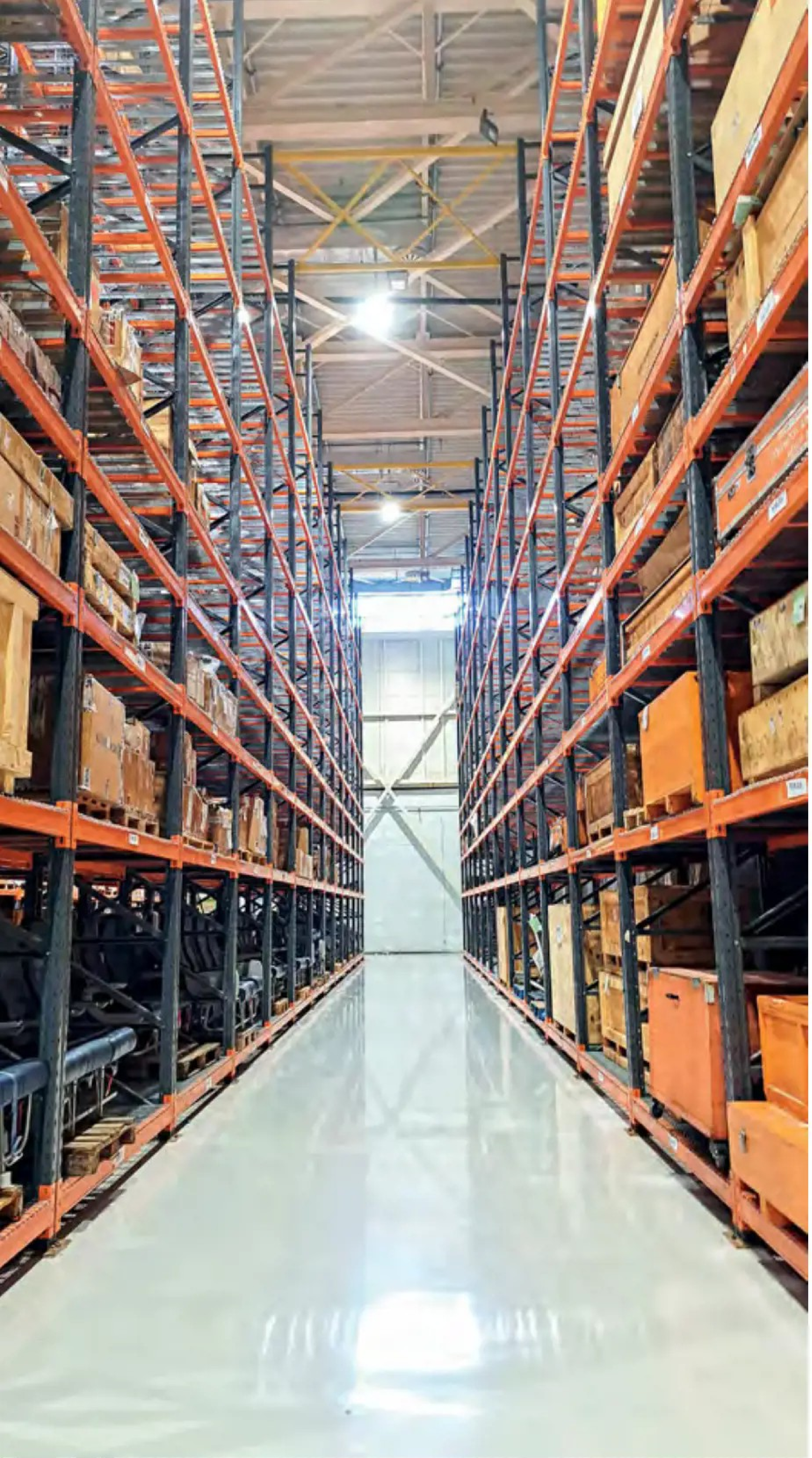
BELOW: ***The massive 27,800m^2 facility can accommodate up to ten aircraft at any one time***

Speaking at the time, AEGEAN said that the deal was attractive to the Greek carrier because Volotea provided it with access to the secondary markets it serves across Europe while complementing its own focus on larger international and domestic markets.

Earlier this year, the airline confirmed that it planned to further invest in Volotea and increase its shareholding to 21% after being "satisfied" with its previous investment. AEGEAN has since injected an additional €6m, bringing its total investment to €31m.

One of its other airline investments is, of course, Olympic Air, the only remaining trace of the country's once iconic former flag carrier (see boxout). "Since 2013, AEGEAN has owned and operated the Olympic Air brand, and it has definitely been a significant step for us in our history,"

AEGEAN
STAR ALLIANCE



ABOVE: ***It also houses a large warehouse where parts are stored, allowing AEGEAN to cover more than 95% of its maintenance needs in-house***

Rasoglou explained. But with talk of ITA Airways resurrecting the Alitalia brand, would AEGEAN consider spreading Olympic's operation outside of Greece one day? "We intend to continue to operate it as we have been, mainly in Greece, and, at the moment, this is how it will remain." The subsidiary currently operates a fleet consisting of three ATR 42-600s, 12 ATR 72-600s, and two De Havilland Canada DHC-8-100s.

Aegean Technic

During the author's visit, a group was given a behind-the-scenes tour of AEGEAN Technics' impressive new €140m aircraft maintenance service centre, with flight simulator and crew training centre, which opened in September 2024. First announced in early 2023, the country's first MRO facility is housed at the former Olympic Aviation Hangar at Athens International Airport, which had been abandoned for over 12 years.

"The opening of these facilities was a significant investment, not just for AEGEAN, but for the country too, placing Greece on the aviation map in this field," Rasoglou said. "Both the MRO and training centres will allow us to meet our maintenance and training needs in a much more efficient, effective and lower-cost way."

During the tour, AEGEAN's base maintenance manager, Stergios Magalios, explained how the massive 27,800m^2 facility works. The previous hangar was capable of handling around three to four aircraft at a time. "But the new facility can accommodate up to ten airframes," Magalios said. "The hangar has been split into areas able to cover both line maintenance and heavier base maintenance, and allows us to cover more than 95% of our maintenance needs in-house. There are also shop areas for smaller repairs and a warehouse which houses spare parts."

Around 20 to 30 technicians will be working on an aircraft at any given time, and each line has its own equipment and tools. Currently, there are also three tail docks fitted, with a fourth to be added. The MRO facility is designed to provide MRO support services for both AEGEAN and Olympic Air, as well as other airlines and aviation companies.

Meanwhile, as part of the carrier's sustainability efforts, 35,000m^2 of photovoltaic panels have been installed on the hangar's roof to meet the facility's energy needs, making it one of the first hangars in Europe to be powered by solar energy.

Next door to the MRO hangar is AEGEAN's new state-of-the-art training facility in partnership with CAE. George Filiopoulos, deputy centre leader, explained that on the ground floor, there is a full Airbus A320 Family cabin mock-up, which allows for all cabin crew training, including both new entrant and yearly recurrent training, to be completed in-house.

The facility also houses four flight simulators: one for the Airbus A320ceo/neo, one for the A320 all-engine option, one for the Boeing 737-800 and a fourth for the ATR 72. There is also additional room for three more simulators. "Previously, our flight crew members would be taken off the flying line and sent away to complete any training," Filiopoulos explained. "Now they can be trained here, which saves time and cost, which makes everything much more efficient."

A quarter of a century since AEGEAN's inception, the airline is now firmly focused on its future."As our CEO, Mr Dimitris Gerogiannis always comments, our goal is to take AEGEAN even further and remain passenger's first choice," Rasoglou described when asked where he envisaged the airline in ten years. "We will be investing in technology to ensure that our customers get the best experience and that we remain a respectable and reputable airline in the wider aviation industry." AW

AEGEAN CAE
Flight Training

LEFT: ***Next door to the MRO facility is the airline's state-of-the-art training facility in partnership with CAE, which houses four flight simulators with room for three more***

RIGHT: ***It is also fitted with a full Airbus A320 Family cabin mock-up, which allows for all cabin crew training, including both new entrant and yearly recurrent training, to be completed in-house***

AEGEAN CAE
Flight Training

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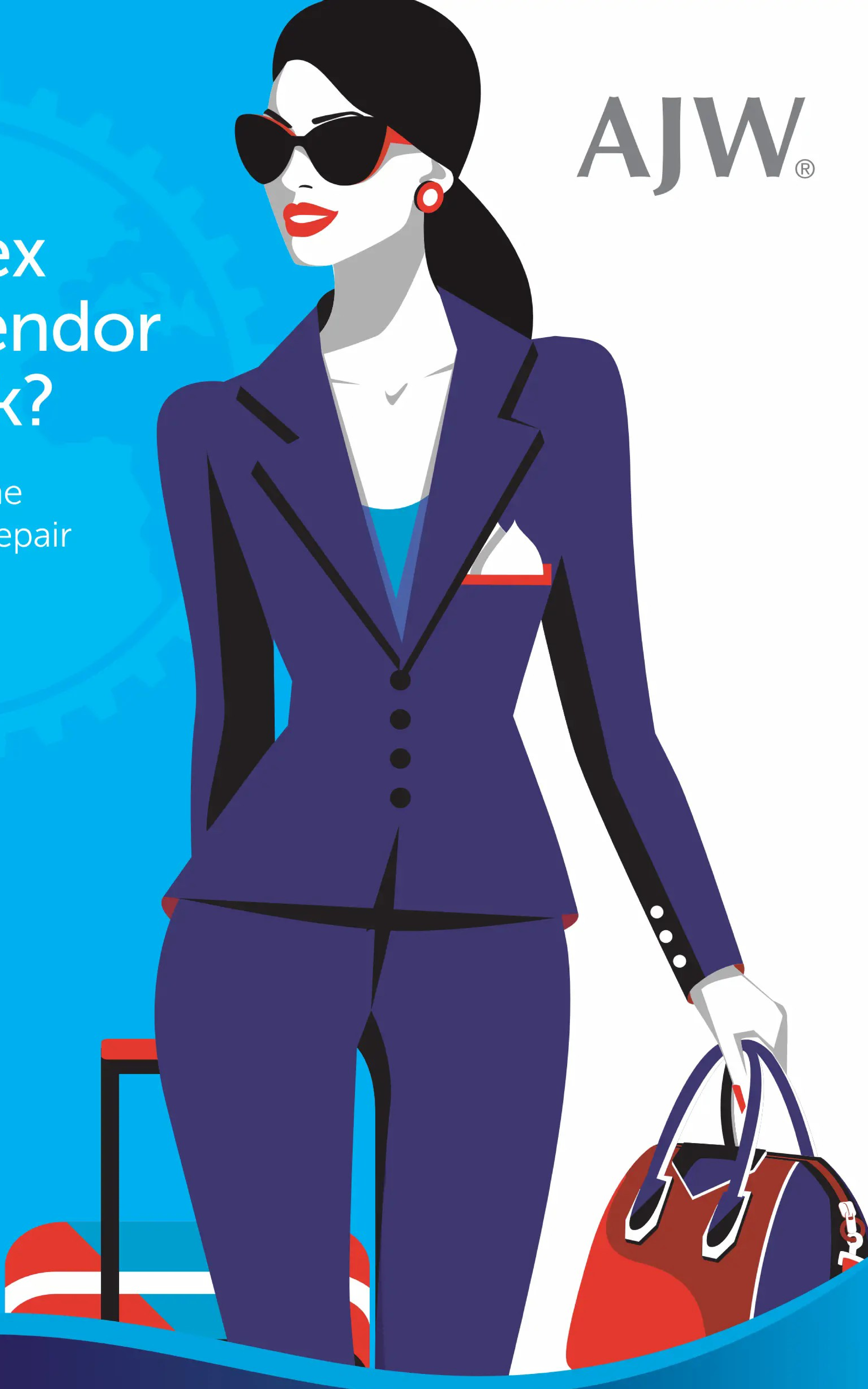

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